

*By the same author*

WOLF SOLENT  
THE MEANING OF CULTURE  
A PHILOSOPHY OF SOLITUDE  
MORTAL STRIFE

THE ART  
*of*  
GROWING OLD

*by*

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## INTRODUCTION

Few things are more stimulating to an imaginative mind, scholarly or unscholarly, than the intellectual game of trying to analyse, if only we can play fair with ourselves and avoid pretence, the real reaction we feel in these tragic modern days to the sensation of growing old.

No modern writer, as far as I know, has discussed this subject as lucidly and eloquently as Cicero discusses it in his *Cato Major*, usually known as *De Senectute*.

It is not now my purpose to defend my favourite rhetorician from the caustic disparagements that the very volubility of his statescraft, the very comprehensiveness of his philosophy, the very eloquence of his moralizing have brought down on his massive head for nearly two thousand years.

Be it enough to drop a hint just here that between the particular temper of Cicero's way of thinking, a temper that might be called the *psychological antipodes* of the Fascist mood, and the mental atmosphere of almost any humane and liberal-minded democratic statesman in the British Commonwealth or the United States, there is a striking similiarity.

There is indeed so much resemblance, that it is impossible not to feel that were Cicero and any one of our more liberal and philosophical statesmen sharing a table in a London or New York café and there suddenly 'entered to them', as some Time-Machine stage direction might put it, the figure of Theodoric the Ostro-Goth from the Dark Ages or the figure of Saint Anselm from the Middle Ages or even the figure of Cardinal Wolsey from the Renaissance, to join in the talk, the legal-minded Roman and the legal-minded Modern would glance at each other in civilized Senatorial surprise.

To Cicero as much as to our modern Democratic statesman government by evolutionary tradition and free discussion would be taken for granted as the natural method. That human freedom as our English poet puts it 'should broaden down from precedent to precedent', would be to both of them the only conceivable system consonant with the individual dignity of man.

Such was the system originated by the Democracy of Athens and

stabilized by the legal and traditional genius of the Roman Republic. Abolish slavery — and Cicero would certainly have discussed life with an open mind — and the Roman and Modern statesmen would have understood each other perfectly. And consider what a thing it is that with two thousand years between us, any ordinary humane and liberal modern thinker can sympathize with the ideas of Cicero, not only with regard to politics and common human morality but with regard to such ticklish problems as the nature and purposes of Providence, and the existence or non-existence of a life after death.

One thing has especially struck my own mind — and how presumptuous it seems to be saying this now, when I recall my struggle at school to compose an essay on 'Patriotism' in the style of this master of eloquence! — one thing, I say, has especially struck me as I compare my present-day feelings about old age with those that Cicero puts into the mouth of the elder Cato. I refer to the similarity between what to-day we regard as the general period when old age *begins* and the point of time assumed for its beginning in *De Senectute*.

Cicero seems to have been 62, and Titus Pomponius Atticus, the life-long friend to whom he dedicates this work, three years older, at the time he was writing it, while his mouthpiece Cato declares himself to be over 80.

The writer of the essay would soon therefore if he were in need of it be to-day a candidate for an old age pension, while Cato's opinions, as an unusually well-preserved old gentleman, would evoke much the same psychological interest as they would in our time from the lips of an extremely aged statesman.

Compare all this however with the amazing precocity and startling maturity of Boethius, writing in the first two decades of the sixth century, or with the attitude to old age of Shakespeare and Montaigne ten centuries later. Montaigne quietly informs us that a man's mental development reaches its culmination before he is thirty, while the learning and sophistication of our Tudor princes and princesses puts both ourselves and these old Roman sages to shame!

If, however, you pressed me to say — as a modern writer already four years older than Cicero's Atticus — just where I find the greatest difference between the line I am led to take and that which Cicero assumes through the mouth of his aged Cato, I would say, without a moment's hesitation, that it has to do with my attitude to Nature.

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As an elderly Englishman — indeed as *any* Englishman, whether old or young — I am in complete agreement with the stress laid by these old Romans upon the pleasures of country-life. But what different pleasures they praise! It is true we seem aware of a faint change of emphasis dimly adumbrated in various passages in the poetry of Virgil, but the tone adopted by Cato the Elder in *De Senectute* makes me thankful that I live, not only so long after Cicero, but while there is still a chance of preventing Science from making Wordsworth seem as antiquated as Virgil.

Cicero's Cato does indeed remark that the poet Ennius at seventy, 'when he was bearing the two burdens which are considered the greatest, namely poverty and old age, seemed *eis paene delectari* — almost to delight in them'; but the gist of his own argument in *De Senectute* hardly goes as far as this, possibly because the feelings of a poet possess a primitive sensuousness denied to a statesman and a prose-writer.

At any rate, the four reasons he gives 'why old age appears to be unhappy' are so extremely practical and definite that in countering them his tone implies a shrewd 'making the best' of a very questionable condition, rather than any enthusiastic enjoyment — *dilectatio* — in it!

The four reasons that Cicero's Cato Major selects as worthy of his animadversion are as follows — I quote from the translation in the Loeb Classics by my late American friend, Judge Falconer of Arkansas: 'first, that it withdraws us from active pursuits; second, that it makes the body weaker; third, that it deprives us of almost all physical pleasures; and fourth, that it is not far removed from death'.

Now, though I admit that Cicero's old hero makes his points powerfully and cogently, to my mind he neglects just the very aspects of the question that tip the scale; and it is these aspects I want to summarize before proceeding further.

I fancy almost everybody who draws near to the beginning of their seventieth year must be struck by the oddity of the fact that inside their own skull they are aware of so little difference! There would be indeed, I suspect, a nearly universal agreement among elderly people that it is a perpetual marvel in the depths of their consciousness that they themselves have at last become what they have so long watched in others, what they have for so long quarrelled with, criticized, pitied, admired, respected, adored and loathed!

I have a notion that elderly people have a tendency to forget the fan-

tastic misconceptions about old age that they had when they were young. One of the errors I am sure we all fall into is to suppose that something happens to the living identity inside this grey-headed, creaking and groaning, lumbering, crotchety, purblind Image, which causes it to resemble its outward envelope. Nothing could be further from the truth. Though the mind's life-history is profoundly affected by the life-history of the body, they by no means run on parallel lines, and the popular recognition of 'old hearts' in 'young bosoms', or as we say, of 'young spirits in withered frames', has become proverbial.

Indeed I would go so far as to say that the expression 'second childhood', with its rather pitiful implication, might well be given a more lively turn; so that one could speak of a 'second youth' in an auspicious rather than an invidious sense. There are in fact many elderly persons who when young were to their contemporaries what is called 'old-fashioned' and who to themselves 'felt old', felt indeed lonely and isolated because of this feeling, and yet who when old age really comes recover, by some felicitous reintegration of their personality, an appreciable measure of the particular sensitivity of youth, a sensitivity which their 'psyche', by reason of some subtle maladjustment, had emphatically missed when they were really young.

Then, again, this impetuous notion of youth that the interior consciousness of old age parallels its outward appearance is refuted by the curious divergencies that occur in the speed or the tardiness of our mental development.

I myself am an example of an exceptionally slow mental growth. When I compare myself as I was at their age with the majority of my young friends I am amazed, not only by their sophistication and 'sang-froid', but by their actual insight. This may be in part a matter of various economic and social changes and of changes in the relation of children to parents, but I am convinced it possesses its personal conditioning too.

Nor do I regard as merely an old man's vanity the urge that prompts me to declare most vehemently that it is better to develop too slowly than too quickly.

I am even tempted to suggest that it is 'on the cards' — one might go further and say 'in their stars' — that certain simple natures possess a deep and crafty instinct which impels them to ward off and resist to the utmost

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the lures and seductions that would betray them — like wild flowers in a hot-house — into too quick a maturing.

A resilient relish for the dramatic spectacle of life, whether we ourselves look fools on the bustling stage or not, is a vital support to the instinct of which I speak.

Another help to it — and I know I am correct in this, for the best of all possible reasons — is the presence, as an invaluable element in us to compel us to go slow, of Simon-pure simplicity.

Precious — yea! thrice precious — is this vein of stupid being in our constitution. It is a vein of so *solidly* organic — dare I call it woodenness? — which thickens out the opaque resistance of simple childishness.

I have an inkling that the newest generation of youth about us to-day — the offspring, shall I put it, of *our* children — shows unmistakable signs of this wisdom, the wisdom of refusing to grow up too quickly!

In the matter of individual character I am inclined to think that a certain contradictory grafting of careless humility upon obstinate egoism offers the best psychic atmosphere for this desirable retarding process, especially if combined with a vivid sensuous response to the simpler pleasures; but I confess it looks to me now as if this newest of generations — people of both sexes youthful enough to be the grandchildren of a person of seventy — were displaying a marked tendency, quite apart from the natural divergencies of individual character, towards the very thing I am advocating, a conscious retardation, I mean, of intellectual development.

This youngest of the three generations among whom we live has instinctively reacted, it seems to me, against the brilliant, witty, and disillusioned sophistication of the one before it, which itself was a reaction from the dynamic devilries and passionate idealisms of my generation!

But the point I am leading up to is that the difficult art of exploiting to felicitous effect the inevitable necessity of growing old is complicated not only by what Cicero himself alludes to, the waywardness of Nature in putting old hearts in young bodies and young hearts in old bodies, but by the Time-Spirit itself, which creates as the mental fashion of one generation a frantic cultivation of mature disillusionment, and as the fashion of the next a deliberate reversion to something like simple childishness.

We are all agreed, I think, that true education never comes to an end;

and we are most of us agreed that at least one of the purposes of education is the refining and deepening and enriching of our enjoyment of life.

Some, I suppose, would have it that *preparation for another life* is of even greater importance: while there remains yet a third group who hold that the welfare, comfort and prosperous future of the Community in which we live far outweigh as the ideal of a sound education any conceivable cult of enlightened egoism.

But however outweighed and outworn such purely individualistic conceptions of education may be, the fact remains that there's not a person in the wide world, whether man, woman or child, who isn't being perpetually self-taught in the varied and complicated art of getting pleasure out of life.

What I am gradually approaching in this circuitous manner is the suggestion that what we call 'advance' or a *forward* movement in tastes, opinions, perceptions, ideas, by no means covers the whole field of education. A movement *backwards* is also desirable, and even this is not enough; for there remains as an ideal, even if it be unattainable, the god-like condition of standing perfectly still.

The notion of 'second childhood' as a misfortune attendant upon extreme old age is doubtless based upon an unfortunate truth; but may I not suggest there is another and less pitiful 'second childhood', or, if you prefer, 'infantile fixation', that St. Paul forgot when he recommended the 'putting away of childish things'?

The Stoics made a wise contribution to the idea of an unending education when they laid so much stress upon being in harmony with Nature; and it seems to me that from a contemplation of the habits of old dogs, old horses, old cats, and even *old trees*, many shrewd hints can be discovered for the skilful self-handling of our human old age. One thing we must surely accept as an axiom in this matter — the necessity for banking up, digging in, and narrowing down.

It is the prerogative of the stream of youth, in the hey-day of its brimming, to spread itself, so to speak, all over the landscape. But who knows not how tiresome and annoying elderly persons can be when they allow themselves certain unbecoming bursts of ebullience.

What we call conceit is pardonable and sometimes even engaging in young people, and it is almost always a useful counterpoise to the inevitable humiliations of life, but a conceited *old* person is a shocking spectacle.

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Not only intellectual humility but what I am driven to call — for it is an evasive quality — ‘spiritual’ humility is a valuable *organum* of discernment and discrimination.

A young person is compelled by life itself to be self-assertive beyond the measure of well-digested opinion; for the critical intelligence refines itself by practice and you’ll never swim if you don’t boldly strike out!

But if by the time we’re sixty we haven’t learnt what a knot of paradox and contradiction life is, and how exquisitely the good and the bad are mingled in every action we take, and what a compromising hostess Our Lady of Truth is, we haven’t grown old to much purpose.

I suppose the hardest of all things to learn and the thing that most distinguishes what is called a ‘ripe old age’ is the knowledge that while bold uncritical action is necessary if things are to move at all, we are only heading for fresh disaster if some portion of our interior soul doesn’t function in critical detachment, while we commit ourselves to the tide, keeping a weather-eye upon both horizons!

Might it not indeed be said that the soundest advice any old life-navigator could give to a neophyte on the broad sea would be that what *has* to be done must be got through somehow; done in the rough if in no other way, but at any rate done; and then on to something else.

And this applies, it seems to me, not only to dangerous outward action, but to the steering of our interior life. We must, in plain speech, make use of the old tools we have grown used to, and aim neither at novelty or perfection.

In brief, we must reconcile ourselves, as we get older, to the charge of ‘living in a groove’. For what, after all, when you come to think of it, is any sagacious *amor fati*, or adjustment of our personal organism to the maturing and ripening and then to the autumnal fall of the great Law of Necessity, if not the acceptance of Nature’s groove? The heavenly bodies follow their allotted orbits; why should we want to be random meteorites?

But the mischief of youth still dominates the fatality of words and to fall into a groove means for most of us to become a fossil.

The word *furrow*, on the other hand, we invariably use in a good sense. But what is a furrow if not the groove by which we begin the seasonable growing of life’s harvest?

During the last war, when youth had outbursts of suspicion that it was



being sacrificed to the ignoble characteristics of old age, there was an uneasy feeling here and there, symbolized, if my reader is old enough to remember, by that ridiculous 'beaver' game symbolizing the tribal dignity of the *patriarchal beard*, that life was being kept in a groove by bits of toasted cheese.

In the present war, however, where danger and pain are more equally distributed, and where so much of what we older people tend to regard as the morbid recklessness of youth has been elevated into a high Spartan prerogative, the young air-bomber — on our side as well as on the side of our enemies — is paying back, in a terrible Eumenidean Nemesis, the blood-debt of a generation.

I can well imagine that, with the far-flung sublimated common sense that remains the centre and circumference of his democratic eloquence, Cicero would agree that no epoch could be more appropriate to a reconsideration of the advantages and disadvantages of old age than an age like the present, where the great Pendulum has swung back with such a startling impetus to the side of youth!

It was the elderly Goethe, whose incorrigible detachment his own generation found so baffling, who remarked that a great man was linked to his own time by his weakness.

Putting aside, however, the sacrosanct prerogatives of 'great men', might it not be said that we are *all* linked to our particular time by our weakness; and that our strength, or rather the strength of which each of us is an uncertain and faltering medium, is drawn from that deeper portion of our individual soul whose values, discriminations, and life-purposes are the accumulated product, not of *our* particular time or of *any* particular time, but of the best that has been thought, felt, and put into action, all the way down the ages?

Over the whole earth to-day this luckless 'weakness' of which Goethe speaks, this fishy, feathery, goose-quill weakness, binding us to our transitory epoch, is being blown hither and thither on the waves of the wireless. The dim gulfs of the Past are full of its flying feathers; so are the interlunar spaces of the Future.

Where then is the escape? Where is the Truth? Where is the Reality? Where is Rest and Reassurance? In one direction only; in that inviolable Present which is not our age, nor our father's nor our children's, but is the ever-recurring *Moment* where all Pasts and all Futures and all Presents

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form and transform and meet and mix and resolve and dissolve; till sinking down with Time itself, their creator and sustainer and destroyer and restorer, into the solitary soul of every one of us, they become that sub-species of eternity which perhaps is the only eternity we shall ever know.

To enjoy old age is to enjoy in a few human years immense epochs of super-human and sub-human life-consciousness. Aeons of vegetative existence are in it following aeons of unrealizable godlike existence. The old cart-horse's husky-harsh breathing into the sunrise, the old carrion-crow's husky-harsh croaking into the sunset, have behind them millions of years of cosmogonic contentment.

Old age holds the life of huge epochs of the Inanimate in its enjoyment of pure sensation; but it contains also that mysterious *energeia a-kinesis* of the immortals.

And in this it approximates with astonishing closeness to that 'infantilism' of the very young which the New Testament calls 'the Kingdom of Heaven'.

But just as we are bound by our 'weakness' to the particular age in which we happen to have been born, while our strength consists in suckling ourselves at the multiple breasts of the ages in history that suit our temperament, it is within our power to move from the one to the other, appropriating, by what might be called *imaginative empathy*, those earlier ages that suit our nature, while we move backwards and forwards along the navel-string of life upon which the beads of Time are strung.

Thus at the moments when we are most ourselves we have something of the 'old-fashioned' about us if we're young and something of the 'child-like' about us if we're old. This modern *De Senectute* upon which I am so hazardously and experimentally engaged is an attempt to emphasize the value, to my own wavering and fluctuating intelligence, of that peculiar static state of which we have to make the best when our years close in; the value in fact of being forced by necessity to abide in what is called a 'groove', a 'groove' in which, as I have hinted, we can not only draw upon the paradisiac impressions of earliest youth, but can anticipate, at least in imagination, the mysterious emotions that will be ours at the approach of death.

It is not simply as a compensatory advantage of old age that we make so much of the static element to which I refer, but as a chance — if I may

use an unavoidable paradox — to practise that passive activity by which our human organism fuses itself with the Inanimate.

I can assure my readers that I touch here on the key-note of our discussion. By far the largest part of the difference between a happy and unhappy old age depends on its power of adjusting itself to the Inanimate.

The older we get *the lonelier we get*; and this means an increase of happiness to those who like loneliness, and a proportionate decrease to those who detest it. The reason why so many old men — even powerful old men like Homer's Nestor — tend to grow so garrulous, is that they experience a rebellious distaste for the loneliness they feel closing in about them. Their garrulosity is like the whistling of a child when the road between school and home begins to darken. Nothing in the world is lonelier than the Inanimate; and between an old man enjoying himself in the sun and a fragment of granite enjoying *itself* in the sun there is an unutterable reciprocity.

The happiness of our old age, therefore, largely depends upon on how far we have carried the cult of enjoying the Inanimate before this final epoch begins.

To certain middle-aged people the intervals between some exacting toil and some exciting pleasure are moments of pure boredom; to others they are the supreme justification of life. And since it is by a constant increase in the length of these moments that our decline — or progress — into old age is marked, with some people it is a case of more and ever more enjoyment of life, with others of less and less!

But there is another important aspect of the psychology of old age which it would be a mistake to omit. I refer to that troublesome psychic phenomenon known as *conscience*. Are, or are not — that is the question — old people less conscientious than middle-aged people?

I am, of course, taking for granted the existence of conscience in all of us, and taking for granted too, that, whether a blessing or a curse, it is fatally entangled with the whole business of being alive. It is indeed to the conscience of youth that old people are supposed to be always appealing and doing so in a most tiresome and tedious manner; while, contrariwise, it is precisely for the insensitiveness of its conscience that youth reproaches old age.

No doubt it would be simpler for both youth and age if some subtle scientific Lucifer could succeed in digging up once and for all the upas-

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root of this divine-demonic bindweed called Conscience that has spread itself through the whole of evolution's cornfield and is always dragging down the beautifullest 'swathe' with all its 'twinéd flowers'.

But though Science has done something in the direction of dehumanizing the human automaton, the process is so retarded by the sacrilegious and impious resistance to vivisection of the vivisected that the dawn of the long-hoped-for age of Homo-Sapiens-sans-Conscience is not only far off but begins to appear problematic.

But granting that every ordinary man and woman has a conscience, whether in spite of Pure Reason the intruder reaches us from another dimension, or whether it is an inherited *taboo* from pre-historic ancestors — it seems to me that the hey-day of its tampering with our peace is in youth and that its energy tends to dwindle in middle age and die down in old age; and this in spite of an increase in our human tendency to lay moral imperatives upon others.

Indeed I think it would be no extravagant paradox to assert that old age's fondness for moralizing is in itself an argument against the supernatural origin of the human conscience. In any case, 'old as I am', as Dryden says, and 'for ladies' love unfit', at this particular moment I am immorally moralizing. In fact, in humble imitation of Socrates, I am endeavouring to mistle into conscience-plagued youth the essential immorality of old age!

Although Immanuel Kant may be right — and for myself I sometimes lean to his opinion — that this trouble in our soul, this arrow in our side, reaches us from outside the astronomical universe, it still remains that so large a portion of the problems that plague us have to do with the old antithesis, *selfishness versus unselfishness*, that it does look, to a superficial glance, as if this 'inner voice' were merely the cumulative voice of society, the voice of other people, the voice of everybody except ourselves, urging us to behave *as suits these others* rather than as suits ourselves.

There do exist however a certain number of mandates, from this *daimon* within our hearts, that, except very remotely and indirectly, concern ourselves alone. And these commands from the quarter-deck, though lacking all connection with other members of the crew, appear to issue from the same unanswerable voice.

What I want to suggest just here however — and I think most people

will agree with me — is that the most frequent jerks and prods and pricks we receive from this source have to do with action.

Now it is in a certain non-moral and unconscientious *inaction* that infancy and old age resemble each other; being, both of them, *outside the law*. It is not so much that they are immoral as a-moral. But the point I want to make just here is that this 'a-morality' is a most desirable consummation, possessing in its essential nature an illuminative virtue, a delicious unction, a magic equilibrium, such as can be found nowhere else in life.

There are, of course, individual exceptions to this norm, as to everything else. I mean there are restless infants just as there are restless old people who suffer what might be described as the boredom of middle-age the moment they are inactive. I know only too well what I am talking about here, for I am one of these unlucky exceptions myself, and I think almost all such cases are of the male sex; but I can only say that to the end of my days I shall do my utmost to acquire this godlike art of passive contemplation.

I can recall in Norwich once catching my maternal grandfather as he reposed in peaceful contemplation of the lights and shadows of evening, upon a sofa that might well have been the very one celebrated by the poet Cowper. At the entrance, however, of his bustling, conscience-ridden, priggish grandson the poor old gentleman pulled himself together, shook off his non-moral and, let us hope, immortal felicity, and uttering the words, 'You must remember, Johnny, that at my age I *can't do anything else*,' gave me, out of a detachment that struck my restless mind as the very profanity of hypocrisy, a pathetically infantile look, a look that seemed to say: 'The Great Taskmaster has left me in peace at last.'

At the moment I was tempted to inquire whether I might not convey to the placid old man some appropriate theological stimulus from his book-case; but I behaved better than I knew and left him alone.

It is indeed in this ultimate profanity, in this supreme rejection of the 'race set before us', in this 'Brown Study' in the midst of the Public Library of the World, in this tasting of the cauldron in lieu of stirring it, in this chewing of the cosmic cud when the bull's in the china-shop, in this eschewing of the chase when the hounds are in cry, that the a-morality of old age coalesces with the a-morality of infancy.

But my point is that like all other recurrent aspects of our present

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Dimension of Life the power which we possess of mixing with the material elements around us and of enjoying them in place of criticizing or changing or loving or hating them, is a power not confined to old age. Certain individuals among us — like Rabelais and Wordsworth and Walt Whitman — discovered somehow the divine trick of merging themselves in ever wider and wider ripples of absorption into the elements around them and in this they represented the wisdom of old age.

Old people are seldom as fastidious as the young, and as the intensity of our sensuous apprehension lessens its exclusiveness decreases.

But the obstinate tenacity of an elderly person's refusal to leave his accustomed 'groove' is frequently denounced as pure unvarnished selfishness. And an interesting point emerges just here; namely the difficulty which a person experiences in the advocacy of a thing about which everybody, though sometimes with qualms of conscience, longs to feel happy and complacent.

For indeed, in this particular matter we stumble, as I have already hinted, upon a somewhat piquant situation. Granting, as we are compelled to do, that both selfishness and unselfishness are necessary to human life, isn't it rather extraordinary that we all, *as human beings in the aggregate*, conspire to confine our commendation to one side of the shield only?

As units, even as conscientious and moral units, we indulge in what, if we take our initial axiom to be true, is at least as important as the other, namely self-realization. But our public and traditional homage and the larger portion of our instinctive homage too is reserved for that aspect of human behaviour we call unselfishness. There are, however, historically speaking, certain important exceptions to this rule. For one thing there is the class of lucky rogues we have agreed, by a quaint inconsistency, to call 'great men', and I think it will be generally agreed that unselfishness is not a marked peculiarity of this type of person. But there is a far more important exception than this.

The profoundest theologians of the Catholic Church have agreed to consider the merit of what is technically called *Contemplation* as equal to, if not higher than, all the virtues entailed in a life of action. Here indeed is a defence of my philosophy of sensuousness from an unexpected quarter!

For this enjoyment of the elements around us, this planetary sensuality

which is so marked a characteristic of infancy and old age, what is it but a profane name for the very thing the theologians call Contemplation? Thus we are compelled to admit that human beings in the aggregate have agreed to tolerate the pronounced tendency of human beings in particular to enlightened selfishness, as long as this desirable satisfaction, however sensuous it may be, can, by means of some sort of subtle *omnism*, be called 'God'.

And since so ancient a religious tradition permits us, in pursuance of this world-old instinct, to regard our enjoyment of the planetary elements as the enjoyment of God, the ironical situation emerges that what is, beyond all possibility of question, the most intrinsically selfish of all forms of harmless human behaviour should be tolerated and even highly commended by the mass of people under the notion that such planetary feelings are 'spiritual'.

In reality they are not spiritual at all. On this subject I can speak with some authority, for I've been an obsessed disciple of Wordsworth's 'elementalism' for nearly half a century and I can bear witness that these divine feelings, though it is very natural to attribute them to communion with God, have not necessarily anything to do with him.

According to the 'pluralism' of William James and Walt Whitman which might be called, par excellence, 'the American Philosophy' it is not with God but with the Next Dimension of our unfathomable Multiverse that they have to do. For myself I hold that the mysterious pleasure which might be called cosmogonic but which certainly is not spiritual such as we enjoy when we are alone with the elements or when we are engaged on some monotonous task that leaves our mind free to wander and our senses at ease, is a pleasure so precious, and so miraculously satisfying, that when our ancient theologians named it 'god' they were only giving it its due praise. God was their all; and this rapturous losing themselves in Nature was like sinking into the arms of God.

In my own private opinion I regard this rapture as the most desirable thing on earth; and the fact that it should be a pleasure associated most especially with infancy and old age is surely an argument in its favour. But a further hint to help us — though it comes from authors very different from Wordsworth or Whitman — ought now to be considered by any critic who aspires to be an adequate medium for the 'open secret' of infancy and old age.

## INTRODUCTION

To refer to that supremely human quality we call *humour*. Now it is, I think, clear that neither the patient plesantries of old age nor the endearing smiles of infancy can be called humorous; nor can they be regarded as being the cause of humour.

Nevertheless I am anxious to suggest that in any basic analysis of the root-essence of this peculiar proclivity, this proclivity which justifies us in accepting as the profoundest definition of *Homo Sapiens* the description of him as 'the animal who laughs'; it is essential we should consider these two ages in the light of an essential element in all real humour — namely detachment from the absorbing pressure of the business of life.

Who are the most unhumorous persons among us? Well! neither old people nor young children; though humour is not, as I have admitted, their especial province.

Surely it must be allowed that the most unhumorous individual you can possibly find is a middle-aged country squire; and after him a middle-aged farmer. At the extreme opposite pole from squires and farmers we may remark that the divine Founders of Buddhism and Christianity lived too intensely to enjoy the peculiar detachment which is the dedicated soil of humour.

I have one old and trusted friend, and a poet too, who whole-heartedly and on this precise ground distrusts, dislikes, and even disapproves of the Jesus revealed in the Gospels; and my friends' disapproval if I am not greatly mistaken extends to Saint Francis and to several other holy men.

Consider on the other side the notoriously wicked figures in history. Wouldn't it be difficult, with the striking exceptions of the Emperor Caligula and our own Richard the Third, to envisage any of them as humorous personalities?

Goethe's Mephistopheles for instance, though he can jest in the manner proper to a gentleman and though he can be caught out in jocular lechery, would scarcely, considered as a humorist, make even another devil *laugh*. In fact it must be admitted, I think, that in our human world in spite of the gargoyles of our churches, there are many more comical saints than there are comical devils!

Is it not a certain absorbed preoccupation with other people's attitude to ourselves that most of all puts a damper upon humour? No really worldly-minded person can be a humorist.

Now this absorbed preoccupation with the verdict of the world is



essentially a characteristic of middle-age; and that is why all busy practical competent middle-aged persons detest and loathe the Circus!

Surely one of the chief parts such people play in life is to be foils and butts to incorrigible humorists! Youth itself, in the impassioned and idealistic intensity of its earnestness, is often a touching and moving spectacle; but only a cynical devil could make sport of this engaging gravity; and such malice could hardly be called humour.

Now what does this mean? Does it not mean that one at least of the essential root-characteristics of humour is detachment from the ordinary and normal business of life?

And where do we find a detachment more complete than in infancy and old age? Of course like all universal human responses to life — like love and hate and desire and fear and pleasure and pain and excitement and boredom — humour is something that escapes any easy definition.

But detachment from the ordinary business of life, detachment from our immediate occupation and duty, seem to be an essential condition for the half-discovery and half-creation — to use Wordsworth's description of what the mind does with the magic of Nature — of the mystery of humour.

Consider the most humorous figures in literature — figures such as Don Quixote, Falstaff, Panurge, Uncle Toby, Micawber — and you will, I believe, agree with me that they all share this detachment from the earnest pursuit of life's ordinary purpose.

Among the characters I have named Panurge is, I suppose, the youngest: but in his most characteristic moods he unquestionably varies between the destructive viciousness of a mischievous infant and the pedantic terrors and panicky orthodoxies of a senile pantaloon.

But there is another side to all this. The persons just named are, of course, imaginary. They are, each one of them, both a creation and a revelation of the humorous element in life. What we are concerned with here is not so much the various ways in which one elderly person can appear comical as the various ways in which an elderly person can *see life and other people as comical*.

As I have hinted Wordsworth's inspired anathesis with regard to the magic of Nature, as 'half-creation and half-revelation', helps us a great deal in our consideration of the supremely difficult problem of the *subject-matter* of humour. Both Don Quixote and Sancho are humorous figures in

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themselves and humorous figures in contrast with each other; but anyone who supposes that the humour of this book ends at this point understands neither his own soul nor the soul of Cervantes.

It almost looks as if to Rabelais and Cervantes and Dickens, as to certain Chinese philosophers, the secret of life was to be discovered in a certain quality *in matter itself* which were difficult not to call a humorous one.

Now it is true that the decline of ebullient ribaldry and exuberant bawdiness which marks the day when we begin, as the saying is, 'to feel our years', can coincide, and often does coincide, with an author's most humorous inventions. Are we to assume from this that there is a humour inherent in the System of Things or, as I prefer to express it, in our present Dimension of the Multiverse, that exists quite apart from the humorist who reveals it, a humour that was there before he appeared and will be there when he has disappeared?

Must we, in other words, envisage the author of Don Quixote as an elderly, war-weary, life-weary, disillusioned veteran, who, out of the riches of his crowded experience and out of his genius for profound observation disclosed once for all the startling revelation that the true reality of life is the humour of life?

I confess that just here — where what is required seems to be an answer to a metaphysical rather than a psychological question — I feel as if I were driving the subject out of my depth and back into the salt sea of mystery, out of which it came.

But leaving out of court the metaphysical aspect of this question, the merest allusion to which must strike that essentially unhumorous individual, the facetious man of the world, as absurd, I only want to make it clear that there is a very close connection between the deepest spirit of true humour and that escape from the sharper bites and more painful stings of practical life which is the special prerogative of infancy and old age.

My sophisticated, middle-aged friends won't hesitate in this discussion to accuse me of doing less than justice to that whimsical and engaging masterpiece *Alice in Wonderland*; a work that does certainly fit in less happily than *Tristram Shandy* or *Our Mutual Friend* into my dogmatic definition.

But this famous fantasy is a hot-house flower, thoroughly artificial, the product of a protected, academic, super-refined seclusion from the vital vulgarity of the real world, and something that when you compare it

with the doings of the unequalled hero of Gogol's *Dead Souls* seems only faintly provocative of that universal response within us which is always craving to respond in kind to the monstrous jest of being alive.

It is in fact out of the dust and sweat and ugliness and banality of ordinary life that Cervantes and Rabelais and Shakespeare and Gogol and Dickens draw the blood and sap and pith and salt of their inspired revelation of the laughing-fits of the First Cause.

Bewitching and seductive as the pretty playfulness of 'Alice' is, it is not the humour of 'the animal who can laugh'; and I suspect that many a devotee of Don Quixote and Pantagruel has been made to feel a solemn ninny and a preposterous prig by the hot-house fancies of sarcastic virtuosos who have no well-spring of natural humour in them!

The point I have been endeavouring to make in all this is simply an explanation of the remarkable fact that while the humorous characters in literature are generally, like Falstaff and Don Quixote, *elderly persons* most old people in real life express themselves dryly and obliquely, or with tiresome prolixity; their vision of things possessing the necessary detachment, but lacking the energy to express it with vigour and aplomb.

In close connection with the foregoing considerations we are confronted, in any historic survey, by certain curious differences in the popular attitude to old age in various countries and various epochs. China for instance is not only itself the oldest of Civilizations, it is also the one that gives to old age its greatest honour.

Among the Homeric Greeks, on the other hand, old age is treated very much as we treat it ourselves to-day; that is with a certain uneasy respect, showing reverential admiration when it does more than hold its own, as it certainly does in the cases of Priam and Nestor, and a sort of fairy-story pride in the presence of a miracle, when, as in the case of Laertes at the close of the *Odyssey*, the gods are pleased to endow it with surprising and transcendent prowess.

The Elizabethan age, on the contrary, is pre-eminently the age of youth. Shakespeare's old men are either tragic victims of their own frantic obstinacy, like Lear and Shylock, or they are time-serving and garrulous dotards like Polonius. In the Hebrew Scriptures again, as in Homer, old age is treated very much as we treat it in our own country to-day, save that the reverence is more patriarchal and poetic, and the exploitation, as in the story of 'our father Jacob', more shameless and direct.

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It would appear that we Anglo-Saxons, at least in our 'upper classes', differ from our French neighbours in separating ourselves more completely from our parents when we 'set up for ourselves'. But in this case it would seem that with the French, as with the Jews and the Welsh, there lingers on a certain aboriginal *matriarchal* tradition, which we, like our kinsfolk in North America, have definitely shaken off; and of which there is certainly no sign at all in the words that Cicero puts into the mouth of his aged Cato.

## OLD AGE IN MAN AND WOMAN

THE moment we leave the discussion of old age in general and confine the subject to the special conditions of life in these Islands we are confronted by the traditional class-consciousness of our British ways.

Now in many respects it would be true to say that just as the United States is the paradise of young women, so Great Britain, and especially England, is the paradise of old men. This statement needs, however, a great deal of qualification directly we try to apply it to *all* the classes in our land.

Do old people, for instance, seem happier or less happy in proportion as they belong to the higher classes among us? Has an aristocratic old age any special advantages, beyond the choice of wines from a superior cellar or the glow of exercising primogenital power over less fortunate relatives?

Or descending to professional gentility, does the self-conscious dinner-jacket and armorial soup-ladle of an upper-middle-class dining-room add appreciably to the happiness of an ironical great-uncle or a sarcastic great-aunt and help them to endure the pitiful little jokes; jokes that are no jokes — *facetiae a-facetiae* — of their middle-aged nephew and his over-burdened wife?

For my own part I am greatly tempted to think that the shameless physical comfort, free from all pretension, such as we find in old-fashioned *lower middle-class* homes, the homes of people who still read Dickens, who still possess bound volumes of Macaulay's Essays and Young's *Night Thoughts*, who still adorn their parlours with artificial pears and apples under glass, who still keep their coal in those painted coal-scuttles that so infuriated Oscar Wilde, is, 'other things being equal', the pleasantest background for masculine old age. It is in houses of this sort that our old gentleman has the most *immediate authority* over the opening and shutting of windows, over the amount of coal to be put upon the fire, over experiments in the shifting of furniture, over novelties in cooking, and above *all over the daily paper*. And he has these advantages undisturbed either by the conventional politeness of upper-class drawing-rooms or by the free-and-easy rallyings of working-class kitchens.

But at this point I am only too well aware that from certain virginal hearts, not less stricken in years than my own, there will arise — if any such glance over these pages — a deep and bitter sigh! Aye! And who knows better than I do what that sigh means?

Not for nothing did I stay, during long years of lecturing for University Extension, in houses of this sort, up and down our Island. I know that for the offering up of the blood of daughters to elderly Minotaurs these lower middle-class homes, without dinner-jackets and without heraldic soup-ladles, have often been torture-chambers of nauseating slavery.

If the screams and laughter of such women, for once allowed to express their feelings towards their cannibalistic begetters, could mingle in one terrific howl of revolutionary hysteria it would be inadequate to convey the impression left on my wandering and I daresay unobservant mind by the selfishness I used to note in these paradises for 'slipperd pantaloons'!

If the Heavens — 'being themselves old' as Lear says — can forgive the infernal wickedness of at least two elderly gentlemen I can clearly recall, it is more than I can do, even at this late date. Of one of them — and I remember well the northern town in which I stayed with him — his unhappy middle-aged daughter confessed to me that he was *never cheerful* save when, as a local magistrate, he had somebody — often, I daresay, a rebellious daughter — to send to jail.

These are, let us hope, monstrous exceptions; but they point to a rather ghastly aspect of Swift's savage remark that there is no such thing as a 'good old man'.

What Swift meant was no doubt that this very same narrowing down of human egoism, until it falls into a certain *groove*, of which I hope to be able, in the following pages, to compose a convincing 'apologia', *can* be responsible — the abuses of the Best being ever the Worst — for one of the most hideous crimes there is. I refer to parental blood-sucking.

Indeed when one considers into what spiritless, life-drained prisoners these victims of 'the Home' can be reduced to it is impossible not to feel that in any Magna Charta of our New Federation of the World one of the elementary Rights of the human soul is the right *not* to be at the mercy of the Family; the right, in other words, to a recognized minimum, for men and women alike, of thrice-blessed solitude and independence.

Even when we turn the shield the other way round, I doubt if the helplessness of old men in working-class homes, often outweighs — so

long as their pension saves them from the workhouse -- what these victims of their luckier brethren in the lower-middle-class are compelled to endure.

But, you will remind me, just as there are more old drunkards than old physicians in the world, so there are more old women than old men.

Now why is it that men are able to enter more fully into the consciousness of women than women into the consciousness of men? Isn't it because men are by nature so detached from Nature that in their wise folly they flout the great Mother-Harlot and float away from her actual-factual wash-tub upon Aristophanic soap-bubbles of immemorial amusement?

And yet, just because these airy bubbles of a man's contemplations are, after all, *made of the soap she has been using*, they carry a nearer guess as to a woman's feelings than, immersed in that soapy tub, she can form about a man's.

All this is in favour of my contention that it would be more possible, in spite of masculine vanity, for an extremely old Cicero to describe the feelings of an elderly Tullia, than for an elderly Tullia to describe his!

And that not because of any advantage in literary talent or in the professional use of their classic tongue, but simply because, in the detachment from the bonds of Nature natural to a Father and a Statesman, he could imagine better what went on in his daughter's mind than she could what went on in his. And the same detachment from Nature of every man alive, that is to say of every statesman alive, is the reason why, with all his humbug thick upon him, he can handle the *Hoi Polloi* better than can a woman.

But now we really do reach the crux of the matter; and although Cicero, after his Roman fashion, has little to say about feminine old age, we are permitted to ask the pertinent question: 'Why are old women so much happier and so much less pathetic than old men? I think this applies equally to all the Four Classes of our Island population. For the unquestionable truth is that though men are the ones who inaugurate, and destroy social distinctions, it is women who apply them to the 'minute particulars' of individual cases. It is women too, since the diffusion of such distinctions through the texture of daily life equalize their pressure, who come near in moments of passion to obliterating them altogether.

But you will ask: 'What has this to do with old women being happier

than "old men"? Well! I can reply in a single geometrical sentence. The circumference of their pleasurable contemplation is twenty times larger than that of men! Happiness, of course, only begins when the fuss and fury and fever of competition has, at least, *pro tem.*, died down. This blessed state comes to us all in connection with our detachment from the world. And it comes more frequently to men than to women.

When, however, they are both old a very important change comes over the picture. Old women find their sphere of uncompetitive contemplation very little affected by the few transitory revivals of the ancient obsession which necessarily occur. These must appear of course at moments; for to display superiority, or to feel superior, is so much a part of our common human nature that only death can cure it; but with the liberation of the years the circle of contemplation *sans* competition has materially widened.

It was always directed, with all its powers, towards the material surroundings of domestic work. It was a contemplation of much more than the fluctuating lights and shadows upon walls and floors and ceilings. It depended on the snatching of hasty glimpses of the whole planetary world through half-open doors and half-curtained windows. It depended on visions of half the cosmos across well-kept garden fences or between rusty area-rails. It was a contemplation of rain on pavements, sunshine on flower-pots, sailing clouds over neighbouring roofs, of fragments of distant but infinitely significant tramlines, of short cuts over dump-heaps to church or pub, of highways where buses start for London or the sea.

And now that she is old and the views from the windows are less wide than before and the starting of the buses less eventful, and the winds chillier, and the rains more wetting, and the smoke thicker above the roofs, this same rain, these same winds with all their alternations of sunshine and dark weather, aren't less but more important than before.

The old shameful-sweet comedy still unrolls its distracting spectacle before her; but she regards it far otherwise than in the days when she played her part therein. It seems to her now as if it were in some queer way remote, and in a yet stranger way *transparent*; so that clean through the 'vitreous pour' of its turbulent procession she can enjoy the true essences of a felicity which the clock-tickings and heart-beatings of this competitive world had driven into the background!

How well she knows now where to look for those planetary signs of the



season and the hour which formerly — save as tokens of release from too much love or from too much labour — meant nothing to her youthful impatience.

Ah! in *those* days the sun might have broken every Law of latitude and longitude since the days of Copernicus, and every Rule of the almanac and the calendar since Julius Caesar — and she would never have noticed it!

But think how different it is with old men! They were never so aware of all these lights and shadows, all these shapes and colours, all these vague expectancies and obscure memories, these essences of long-past reveries, these premonitions of hidden futures! How precisely and as a matter of fact do men most often experience these contemplative delights when their souls escape from the devouring urge of the *Will to Live* into that 'blessed mood, wherein the burden of the mystery wherein the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world — is lightened'?

Well, I think few men will deny that they reach them when they are away from their home and at their day's work; reach them in the fields, or on the railway, reach them in salesrooms and over shop counters, in offices and workshops, or shipboard, and harbour dock, in factories, and barracks, in libraries and laboratories in engine-rooms and workshops, in board meetings, in sweat shops, church meetings, and stoke-holes; and some would even add on race-courses and football fields.

Here we touch the great handicap of masculine old age. Old men, when superannuated and helpless in the house, are at a double disadvantage; for not only have they lost the natural ardours and exaltations that come to men during their day's work, but they have also lost touch with the particular objects — office windows, or factory skylights, portholes or mine-shafts, ploughed fields or sheepfolds, fishing nets or blast-furnaces, shop counters or box offices, railway platforms or street crossings, lorry seats or cobblers' benches, class-room blackboards or lavatory basins — where, in the off moments of their day's work, they were able to derive, by the mercy of providence, by the favour of chance, by a lapse of the boss, by a shift of the wind, by a turn of a wheel, by a mote in a ray, that magical sensation of life that makes us feel that some sort of *bon espoir*, even if it isn't 'at the bottom' of all life's outrageous horrors, is at least flickering and fluttering not so very far away!

However fond he may be of his wife and children, however much he may have been petted at home and his tastes and caprices catered for, the

fact remains that the greater number of moments in his existence when he has felt that sudden thrill of indescribable happiness, '*the pleasure which there is in life itself*', have been moments away from home rather than at home.

And such moments are associated in his mind with textures, contacts, appearances, sounds and smells, vistas and horizons, risks, endurances, relaxations, such as have nothing to do with seeing his slippers brought to him by his grandchild or enjoying the prerogative of a first glance at a virgin newspaper! No, they are associated with the salt taste of his own sweat and with the tingling motions of his own blood and with that peculiar glow — half-physical and half-psychic — that men get during their momentary detachments from their daily job when, satisfied that it is going as it should, they contemplate it as God contemplated his creation.

And if our old gentleman belongs to the upper class or the middle class and his felicitous moments of detachment have been associated with other aspects of the material envelope of this terrestrial globe than those out of which rope and tar and fodder and coal and leather and flour and bricks and steel and cement are made, it still remains that no catering to his fancies in wine and coffee and fish, no humouring of his preferences in the matter of lamps and newspapers and screens and footstools and music and card games and library books can evoke, in his retirement from Law, or Business, or Politics, or Medicine or Public Administration, or the supervision of 'Property', the same indescribable thrill of enjoyment that he used to get when in some moment of casual reverie he detached himself from his daily preoccupation!

Yes, compared with the old age of women there does seem to be a peculiar poignance and a special sort of pathos about the condition of an old man who is superannuated. Women's work is like farm work, or like the work of the Emersonian 'Oversoul'. *It is never over*. A superannuated woman is a contradiction in terms. But an old man can be hopelessly and desolately superannuated if he doesn't cling to some all-obsessing hobby.

In the puitsance of any sempiternal caprice, whether it be the breeding of spaniels, or the hybridizing of roses, or the disentangling of the convolutions of a lost syntax, an old gentleman can be at once actively selfish and the passive recipient of celestial overtones.

The subject-matter of the hobby in question, its substance and purpose,

value and significance, is of little moment. Where its importance lies is in its power to resemble his life's work. in so far as that work occupied him away from — and absorbed him away from — and sometimes even carried him away from — home. He has never enjoyed these precious intermittent moments which are the supreme pleasure of life *except as reactions* from some activity that has implied mechanical or mental exertion.

And even from his present hobbies — if they are mechanical and technical and difficult enough — he can fall into 'brown studies' full of exquisite vistas. But the mere enumeration of these advantages in this reasonable order shows how handicapped every old man is compared with every old woman. She finds her moments of blissful detachment, where she has always found them, in the intervals of a domestic routine *which never ends*; whereas he has to *wait for them* till he is alone with his dogs, or his roses or his herbarium, or his fossils, or his walking-stick handles or his net making or his carpenter's tools, or his experiments with quarried slate, or his whittlings of hedge roots, or his excursions to the trout stream if the fish are rising, or to the rabbit warren if the keeper is his neighbour, or to the fir copse if there are pigeons to be shot, or to his vegetable allotment if it isn't too wet, or to the beach if there's any sun to dry the nets.

All these considerations have only to be glanced at for it to be obvious what an advantage, in the pleasures of inspired sensuousness, your old woman has over your old man.

Why, she has only to listen to the splash of the rain on her window, only to hear the train go whistling through the tunnel, only to watch which way the weather-cock points, only to sit in peace knitting by the fire while the golden faces and goblin grimaces greet her from the grate, to be at the very threshold of those worlds not realized to enter which is our nearest approach to heaven!

But I have not yet named the deepest advantage of all that old women have over old men; the advantage, namely, of being able to be happy while the mind remains vacant. By using this expression I am not attributing any inferiority to the old lady's intelligence; far less am I suggesting that she is more of an animal than her man.

In fact in my own private and secret system of values I keep a high place for this power to 'reduce the mind' — as the phrase is — 'to a blank'.

'The whole problem of the nature and quality of the human consciousness in quiescence, whether in fact this function that we feel working within us when we use the phrase 'my mind' is to be praised or blamed when it falls into absent-mindedness or a 'brown study', is one of the most important of all human questions. And it has been strangely neglected by both metaphysicians and psychologists!

Metaphysicians have analysed the way the mind *thinks* when you isolate it in an imaginary void: and have carefully tabulated its elaborate thinking process. Psychologists have analysed the way the mind works when swimming in the high tide of reality and when will and desire and love and hate are foaming around it. And such investigations have their importance.

But there is yet another side to the whole problem; and it seems to me that the particular role which can be played by the simple common sense I am trying to represent and for which specialists have such contempt is to visualize in a series of images that can be grasped by the mind's eye precisely what an ordinary person does feel or imagines he feels when he uses the expression; 'I am happy' or 'I am unhappy' and adds: '*in my mind*'.

Try the old tedious and oft-rung-upon experiment once more, reader, only with what they call 'a new orientation'! Try your best to make your mind a blank. Get rid of all thought except the thought of getting rid of thought. You will, I think, soon discover that the most successful start you can make in this campaign to put the contents of your consciousness to flight is simply to shut your eyes.

But even when that is done it is not always with pure unmixed darkness that our mind fills us. Our consciousness is like a cup, held in a flowing stream. It collects bubbles and beads of drifting foam. It collects straws, dead leaves, sunbeams, shadows, reflections.

But having induced it to drop as much of its activity as we can, let us proceed to force it into an acquiescence so deep that the simple reportings of what senses are left — the hummings of the life-stream — are all that matters. The mathematical, platonic, and abstract Ideas of thinking are then completely annihilated, and the Past and the Future are annihilated with them; so that the Present alone exists.

The first result of this self-consciousness deliberate 'brown study' of which the whole method is at the extreme opposite pole from what the Hindus call *Yogi*, is to emphasize *pure sensation* at the expense of all else.

Perhaps it would be safer to open our eyes at this point lest, old as we are, our psychological experiment is lost in sleep. Let me beg you to suppose, therefore, indulgent reader, that you are an elderly tradesman spending a quiet evening in the company of your elderly wife. You are sitting in one arm-chair and she in another, on either side of the fire, each of you with your feet on what might be called a biblical footstool, an object resembling a large church-hassock in an old-fashioned evangelical pew.

Now I implore you to analyse exactly what your self-consciousness really and truly feels, in its relaxed passivity, about this not very complicated situation. Permit me to ask you at once with uncivil bluntness a simple question: Are you intensely, irresistibly, overpoweringly conscious, the moment you begin to think about it, of your separate integral identity as distinct from the identity of the old lady on the opposite side of the hearth? I mean, you don't, I take it, even for one moment, feel as if yourself and the familiar figure opposite were one single creature with two consciousnesses?

Such a feeling is, I believe, not unknown to an elderly couple; but I confess such is not my own experience. What I feel, and I have an inkling you must feel the same, is as if the whole chamber with its two human beings facing each other, one of which — the old lady — you can see in her totality, the other — yourself — only as a body and legs, were floating in a vacuum.

Well! Examine precisely what your impression is of this same vacuum in which the whole of an old lady, and all but the head and neck of an old man, are at present reclining in the midst of their well-known furniture and in front of a blazing fire.

I think you will be driven to admit that you recognize in this vacuum or invisible container of the room with its fire and its furniture and its three-quarters of an old man and its whole of an old woman, 'nothing less than your own consciousness, *your own mind*'. You are the 'vacuum' in which it all floats! This is your primary experience, an experience of a more vivid and immediate sort than the impression which naturally comes next, namely — and this second impression is a corollary or a rational conclusion following from the first — that the old lady's consciousness is a second 'vacuum' or 'container' in which the same objects are suspended, with the sole difference that in this other 'ensemble' the

old man appears in his totality, while the old lady appears — we are, of course, eliminating the possibility of a mirror — as a body without a head.

But you will ask: 'What next?' Well! it is now that I come to my point about the deepest of all advantages that old women have over old men. The situation as I have described it would be incomplete without mention of a further sensation or feeling, or whatever you like to call it, that you are aware of in yourself, and by a reasonable analogy, are forced to attribute to your companion.

I refer to the awareness you have that the *containing vacuum*, otherwise your 'mind', in which everything around you, including the whole of the old lady's person and all you can visualize of your own person, is felt by you to be suspended, is something more than self-conscious passive container of the various shapes and colours and sounds and scents and waftures of heat and cold which make up all that now surrounds you.

It is so much more — and you know this in the only way a thing can be known beyond all doubt, namely by an interior and immediate *identity with it* — that you are compelled to regard it as a living Being. It is a conscious creature, a person, an entity, an individual 'self' or 'soul' or 'ego' or 'psyche'; and it possesses the power — at least that is the form its self-consciousness inevitably takes — of being able to indulge or nourish or cultivate an intense relish for what it is watching and feeling, or an intense disrelish. In other words it can struggle to enjoy what it contains, or it can struggle to intensify its distaste, disgust, and contempt for what it contains.

There rise before it indeed, as it proceeds in this crucial introspection, the twin dragons of the abyss, the red and the yellow dragon that Merlin showed to Vortigern; namely ultimate Boredom and ultimate Relish; and simultaneously with these, the feeling that it can, as a living creature, throw the magnetic energy of its existence into immersion or rejection.

By this time the reader must doubtless see whither I am conducting him; for this whole life-process of the choice between enjoying the spectacle of things and being depressed by the spectacle of things is 'a turn of the scene', as Burton calls it in his *Anatomy*, dependent upon the mystery of association.

Now our old man — as we have tried to show — has grown accustomed to associating his normal life-pleasure with objects outside the laboured-for, scrubbed-for, arranged-for, blushed-for, economized-for artistries of

the home. Whereas to the old woman it has become a second nature to contemplate with satisfaction her clean hearth, her swept floor, her immaculate walls, her polished furniture, her unimpaired view through her well-scoured windows, and the matriarchal fairy tales told to her night after night as the flickering flame dies down and the silent coals grow voluble.

And there is more in the old lady's advantage even than this; for her whole feminine organism, body and soul in one, is so embedded and immersed in Nature and Matter and the Elements, that she is aware of a thousand fluttering, flickering, pleasure-besecuring variations in the daily behaviour of these three mysteries that are completely wasted upon the detached senses and preoccupied intelligence of that superannuated abstractor of quintessences, her aged husband.

But allow me, reader, to place on the lap of our old lady and on the outstretched knees of our old man, their own especial book, or magazine, or newspaper, probably quite different in contents, and at once the whole situation is changed!

Now they are enjoying the same miraculous escape, the escape offered by the discovery of printing to both the sexes indiscriminately, the grand modern escape of the bi-sexual soul of Homo Sapiens, the relaxing of the pressure, whether it be boring or thrilling, of the immediate Present, by a blessed excursion into 'the ampler ether, the diviner air' of *some place else*.

Here in the heavenly benediction of 'being happy reading' they are at last at one; and though as Elia hints, Mary may prefer honest fiction or the Events of the Great World, and Charles the Curiosities of Literature, they have both taken sanctuary from the bustling preoccupations of their middle-aged relatives as well as from the vexations and troubles of their own minds, in that Land of Beulah, 'far, far from here', where long ago as boy and girl they were wont to forget their troubles, that 'Paradise Regained' to which all mortals, old and young, possess the key, as long as they are able to — *read*.

## FEMININE OLD AGE AND NATURE

THE Happiness of an elderly person depends most fatally upon Nature; and all the resistances and resiliences which a human soul can muster up are necessary against the withering and blighting effect of Nature's unpropitious moods. As far as the simpler conduion of weather and climate are concerned when these become hostile, old age has many advantages over youth. For one thing, it can afford to remain under cover — a very obvious retort to the evil spirits of the air.

At the same time the enforced abatement of so many activities which necessitate daily exposure to the caprices of the elements results in a much subtler response to changes in climate and atmosphere.

A person in what we call the 'prime of life' is usually so absorbed in the excitement of pursuing his immediate purposes, that he misses the impact of those atmospheric motions and ethereal influences that pass us by on swift and airy wings.

And yet these are things that stir the human consciousness to its depths. When we're old we no longer make the drastic resolutions of youth; but we do have our own peculiar and complicated ways of readjusting ourselves, often all over again, to the pressure of life.

In making use, for instance, of our enforced quiescence, it is astonishing how far we can develop our apprehension of all the rare and subtle effects which the varying play of the weather upon the material elements about us evokes, both within-doors and out-of-doors.

Most people who are approaching seventy have had some taste of the quickening and heightening of the life-sense which comes with what we call *convalescence*; and there is undoubtedly something in the physical condition of old age which can stir up those same exultantly tearful, deliciously maudlin, divinely idiotic feelings, radiant as those of a god in love, entranced as those of woman with a new-born child, which make convalescence such a paradise.

But, you will say, the quintessence of convalescence is the passing from illness to health while that of old age is the passing from health to the



disease that is destined to end us! I fully admit this important difference: but the fact remains that while Sunrise brightens into day and Sunset darkens into night, the peculiar essence of the two twilights, ere they reach their antipodal goals is almost, though I admit *not quite*, identical.

The winnowed senses of old age, as they respond to this second twilight of the Gods, have indeed one important advantage over the quickened pulses of convalescence. That is to say they are under the control of an indurated, self-contained and rational common sense, whereas emotions of the convalescent are often roused to a feverish excitement.

I have an inkling, however, that one great resemblance between the concentrated and sensitized response of old age and the similar response by convalescence to the subtle changes of the elements has to do with the natural diminishing of the erotic urge.

One of the most untrue of our present-day snatches at pseudo-science is the opinion that our delight in Nature has its root in sex.

At the same time the self-mutilation in classic myth of the frantic lovers of the great Mother does suggest that Nature's tendency is rather to drain us of sex-magnetism than to act upon us like an aphrodisiac. There is no doubt that 'being in love' can heighten our enjoyment of Nature; and there must have been many saints who have depersonalized and dehumanized their natural feeling by diffusing it through the objective world.

There are individual exceptions in all these things; but I think we might argue that both the normal middle-aged person in a state of convalescence and the normal elderly person 'feeling', as I heard Thomas Hardy once say, 'his age' are largely liberated from the pricks and stings of erotic desire. Such persons are aware, at the same time, of a negative and a positive experience.

There is a diminution of the provocativeness of the opposite sex and there is an intensification of the magic of the elements.

There is no doubt a great deal of eroticism in the doting devotion which old people of both sexes tend to lavish upon their youthful favourites; and though all human passion can rouse that jealous anguish which is 'as cruel as the grave', who can deny that old age is often invigorated, though it is sometimes tragically hurt, by its emotional attraction to youth?

To speak frankly, I would say — as far as my own observation goes — that old women, by reason of the subtler diffusion through their veins of

the sweet poison, can afford to play with such feelings more safely than can old men, but where Sex-Passion of any sort, normal or abnormal, simian, serpentine, saurian, or sacerdotal, enters wisdom evaporates. Nature warns the very oracles of God to weigh their words where they meddle with lovers, old or young, male or female!

I am, however, on the sure ground of personal experience when I assert that a conscious, deliberate, concentrated struggle, against what odds you will of place, circumstance, or infirmity, *to enjoy the elements of Nature* opens up a vista of satisfaction at once so mysterious, so alluring, so difficult, so unending, that it serves as a substitute, and more than a substitute, for both Love and Religion.

Old people who are wise in this matter literally *throw to the winds* all conventional verbiage about our reactions to Nature being healthier, sounder, sweeter, when they are left to chance and occasion. Whether we enjoy being alive or not is far too important an alternative to permit of any method being discarded on the ground of its being too self-conscious, or too pedantic, or too priggish, or too egoistic, or too self-centred. Better be self-consciously happy than willfully gently miserable. Better be a pedantic prig enjoying yourself than an unconscious simpleton tormenting yourself.

Incredible are the superstitious prejudices of the human race! Slavishly we prostrate ourselves before the Holy Office of Physical Science, crying 'Science Teaches!' 'Science Speaks!' 'Science Proves!'

We are prepared to swallow as Infallible truth any crude and transitory dogma, if it comes with the Imprimatur of Science; whereas when we're concerned with our own personal experiments conducted by the single power we possess, that can perform miracles, *namely our own mind*, a thing moreover upon whose attitude and temper our whole happiness depends, we are too lazy, too stupid, too sceptical, too frivolous, and, above all, too busy, to take the trouble to make any steady, industrious, obstinate, and enduring effort!

But you will say: 'Isn't old age the age of *grooves*? Isn't it the age of hopelessly-formed *habits*? Isn't it the age when our weaknesses and infirmities, when our losses in vital force and mental energy, have sapped our initiative and destroyed the power of concentration?' Yes, it is the age of all that: and yet so formidable, so godlike, is the creative and destructive power of the most abject old person's soul, that it is possible

for us to use these habits, these grooves, these very weaknesses and infirmities, as an artist uses the necessary limitations of the medium of his art. What is the most pragmatic and evocative of all mortality's 'grooves'? The 'groove' of sex itself — whether you are a male or a female! *Limitation in the medium used* is the first necessity of all art. And sex is the ultimate limitation.

Here then at the very start of our discussion concerning the ways and means of exploiting the advantages and circumventing the drawbacks of old age in its relation to Nature we come bolt up against a basic fatality, the question, namely, whether we are doomed to treat Nature in the manner of a man or in the manner of a woman. Allusions to this curious and fascinating topic are far rarer and far less illuminating than an ordinary person, anxious to analyse the precise human feelings that have been lumped together as 'cosmic emotion', would believe possible. There is indeed a very close relationship between a response to Nature and a response to the Mysteries of Religion.

In both cases there is a decided tendency, and I could bring myself to call it an almost inevitable tendency towards a vague, obscure, and profoundly erotic mysticism; and when we think of the mystical writers — even in our own language alone — *who have been women*, compared with those who have been men, I think it is impossible to resist the conclusion that what is called 'mystical ecstasy' — an experience common to lovers of Nature and lovers of God — manifests a most interesting divergence, and takes upon itself strikingly different forms, as it appears in feminine contrasted with masculine sensibility.

A man, instinctively and spontaneously, just because of the particular character of his erotic urge, mentally and with all his senses seizes upon Nature as though to ravish her; and, even in the case of the Mystery of God, upon this also the man lays hold, even as Jacob laid hold upon the Angel and wrestled with it all night long!

And like Jacob with his Angel, who really, of course, was the 'Anima Mundi' or Soul of the World, Goethe, Wordsworth, Shelley, William Blake, Walt Whitman, all wrestle with this particular cosmic Dimension of the Multiverse as if they were ravishing it.

But how different from Jacob's are the religious ecstasies of the great women-saints; and how different the attitude of women-poets to Nature! In both cases it is a tone, a temper, a mood just as noble, just as inspired,

just as exciting, just as illuminative as the masculine one; but being the expression of feminine feelings, as distinguished from those of the male, in a situation — that is to say when dealing with Nature or God — supremely adapted to sex-excitement, it is fascinatingly different.

Nor can I feel that it is carrying our investigation too far when I suggest that there is yet a *third attitude* to God and Nature; namely the attitude of that rare type of human soul which is neither Homo-sexual nor yet Lesbian, but is what may be called bi-sexual; not so much under-sexed as possessed, like Homer in his *Odyssey* and like Euripides in so many of his plays, of the erotic essence of *both* sexes within its own circumference.

A grand example of this third type of human soul, when expressing mystical rapture, is Emily Brontë's. Who can forget her defiant cry to her own unconquerable spirit? —

Thou, thou art Being and Breath  
And what *thou* art can never be destroyed!

The poet Wordsworth, though his own personal attitude to Nature is so definitely masculine, gives us the clue again and again to the very essence of the feminine response, a response passive rather than active, and yet a response that in its absolute possession by the elements goes further than it is possible for a man to go in the direction of becoming a medium for the powers of air and earth and water and fire.

An old woman has a subtle advantage over an old man in her instinctive response to the Inanimate; and it must be remembered that though so many of the Inanimate Objects that absorb her attention are to be found indoors rather than out-of-doors, they are continually under the influence of air and light and colour and shadow from outside.

Indeed, when we compare the impression of what painters call 'still life' given us in Dorothy Richardson's great work with similar impressions in the pages of Walter Pater, or Marcel Proust, or Henry James, the advantage, I mean in regard to a complete obsession by these Inanimate Presences, all of them under the fitful ministrations of weather and season, is entirely hers.

But have women the advantage over men in the pleasure to be derived from Nature and the Elements *out-of-doors* as well as *indoors*? This is a nice question, worthy of the deepest and gravest consideration.

On the whole I think that in regard to the Elements under the open sky — and I use this general term in place of any specific 'scenery' because I want to exclude just now all aesthetic, picturesque, and pictorial aspects, of Nature — women's social and economic preoccupations put them at a disadvantage compared with the jobs, professions and sports of men. To put it plainly, I fancy that a woman setting out to do her shopping or pay her calls has less surplus of mental and physical energy, less margin of free attention, for earth and sky and sea and the moods of the weather, than men possess.

Besides, the natural fragility of women, their frailer bodies, together with the greater danger to *what they wear* from wind and weather, militate against that complete abandonment to the elements, which, when allowed its full fling, can go so far and be so absorbing.

And there is, I suspect, a deeper difference between woman and woman in this matter than between man and man. Let us consider this point. When they do abandon themselves to Nature it is, I fancy, in one or other of four ways. They can, to put it briefly and crudely, give themselves to the elements, *first* as possessive and maternal Envelopers; *second* as Narcissistic Self-Lovers; *third* as virginal-athletic Dianas; *fourth* as Men-Cozeners, or Dryads playing up their mates. I have excluded what is called the 'artist-type' from this catalogue because the artist-type tends in its essential being to be bi-sexual, at any rate in imagination.

The type of woman that I have called the Enveloper is the maternal type. She enjoys everything out-of-doors with the rich and easy unconsciousness of a first-born daughter of the Great Mother. She discriminates little and rejects nothing. She is an effortless medium for the feelings and sensations which it is hard not to believe represent the sub-mental, sub-human feelings of the planet itself. Sunshine and showers cherish and nourish her; snow and frost stimulate and challenge her; and when she has definite partialities or particular attractions, she will constantly refer to these with a possessive complacency that makes them in a curiously intimate manner her very own. They become *her* sun, *her* rain, *her* frost and snow; and always, as if she were a veritable microcosm of the maternal earth, she will dispense with wonder, with surprise, with admiration, while she caresses what enhances her well-being, avoids what diminishes it, with a massive aplomb that is as humble and unassuming as it is easy and spontaneous.

What, therefore, it seems to me that an old woman of this maternal type should do — in case she *did* determine, which is very unlikely, to use her intelligence in any deliberate attempt to increase her insunitive pleasures — would be to add month by month and season by season, gradually, industriously, a little here and a little there, more *mental* awareness; till through the dulllest continents and obscurest hinterlands of her animal-being there ran new channels of conscious recognition.

Much easier, because of the lesser weight of what Gertrude Stein calls the 'stupid being' in her, is any deliberate increase of pleasure in Nature for the type of old lady I have presumed to describe as Narcissistic.

With her mind still youthful — for these unmaternal women never lose their resilience — an elderly person of this sort can discount rheumatic joints and withered cheeks, can laugh at dimmer eyesight and duller hearing, while day by day, if she direct her whole attention to the experience, she can gather deeper and deeper into the very substance of her flesh the mystery of rain and sun, of dawn and twilight. Her chief pleasure as a young girl has been in the feeling of her own body — never mind what others have thought! — and in the porousness of her flesh to the elements. And now that she is old she can grow to care, if so be that she wishes and wills it, less and less for the opinion of friends and neighbours, less and less for anything or anyone outside her immediate feeling, of herself, by herself, and for herself!

As all know who have lived with this type, all this can exist side by side with plenty of good sense and unselfish behaviour! It is the secret overtone, the hidden undertone, of an inviolable self-centredness to which she has an absolute right, the right of all living things to their own solitary and incommunicable cosmic emotion.

The secret life of this type of old woman is her own. None can give it to her. None can take it from her. This feeling she has for her own body — withered and feeble, heavy and sluggish as it may have become — is a thing between herself and the mysterious Dimension in which fate has enabled her to grow old. It is a thing between her and Life. It is her life, and if she wills it so it will be until the end.

But to come to our third type. Nothing could be more different from our Narcissistic old lady than this race of virginal Dianas! It doesn't require any particular psychological insight to recognize the fact that the physical accident of maidenhood, whether the maiden be young or

old, has nothing to do with the psychic and neurotic and mental destiny of the woman who is a born Artemis, a born Huntress of the super-human delights of the Inanimate, a born Freemason of the elements.

Such an one may have had, like the woman of Samaria, five husbands. She may have had, like the wife of Nereus, fifty children. These are the mere externals, the mere circumstances, the mere series of Concentration Camps, of her life's background. The heart of her life, its continuity of essences, its invulnerable sequence of inner experience, is her escape from humanity into Nature. Her true mate has always been the Inanimate. Her psychic love-life has always been her ravishing by the Elements.

The nervous characteristics of what is called old-maidenishness are the outward expressions of an inward irritation suffered by reason of her own misunderstanding of her own true destiny. Thus her grand opportunity to be herself is often delayed till she is old; and this is why she is generally the happiest of all these four types of old women.

It will at last come over her — perhaps in some sudden revelation, perhaps by a gradual illumination — that she is the dedicated Vestal of earth, air, water, and fire; and that she has an inalienable right to this elemental loneliness. Then, more and more, the frailer and feebler her body grows, the nearer will she approach in her inmost psychic identity, to an ecstatic communion with Nature.

And if she is wise she will concentrate her whole will upon carrying this natural fatality to its extreme limit. By a thousand tricks and devices, by a thousand deceptions and subterfuges, she will escape from her domestic duties and her emotional human relationships into that divine margin of her days wherein she is the bride of the sub-human and the superhuman. She has always been what might be called a Novice of the elements; and now in her old age she takes the final vows, and becomes a veiled Nun of the Cosmic Order!

Passing on to our fourth and last type of feminine old age in its relation to Nature, it would seem that the sort of old lady whose whole attitude both to the Inanimate inside and to the Inanimate outside her own four walls is dominated by her devotion to men and by her intense consciousness of what they think of her, comprises the large majority of old women to-day. These are the ones who take such trouble with their appearance, with their dress, with their language, with their gestures. These are the ones whom men, old and young, naturally prefer; for they

wait on men, they anticipate men's wishes, they take men's tone, they share men's interests, they assume men's tastes; while they humour, cajole, and flatter the life-illusion of all the men they meet. Both in their culture and in their expression of their culture they find it easy and natural to adopt the traditional mental atmosphere created by men.

Thus their attitude to Nature, at first consciously, then insensibly and instinctively, comes to resemble that of men, save where it takes upon itself, for provocative reasons, some traditionally feminine tone ostentatiously opposite to, and hence different from, the expected masculine one.

These are the old ladies who will swear to a literary man with whom they are flirting that he makes them think of 'a grey wolf' or of a 'faun'. These are they who are so quick to acquire the botanical, ornithological, geological, and even the poetical jargon of the man or the men with whom they associate.

They have so long, as daughters, sisters, sweethearts, wives, and mothers, and aunts, humoured, indulged, and been provocative to men, that between their very skins and the natural elements there has arisen a sort of reciprocal mist, made up of the responses of their lovers and sons to these planetary influences, so that even as grandmothers and great-grandmothers they prove — where men are concerned — the most perfect of out-of-door companions.

There are bound to arise however in the process of time, and under the inevitable shocks of destiny, occasions when old ladies of this type find themselves alone; and it is then that some sort of inner adjustment becomes imperative if they are, as we say, to go on with the game.

Well! What kind of inner adjustment? They have lived, since their childhood, in and through and by and for the opposite sex. Their prejudices, their refinements, their values, their tastes, their culture and their barbarism, are all vicarious, are all things that though specifically appertaining to women have undergone a peculiar colouration that assimilates them to the traditional attitude of men.

How then are they, at this last lap of their mortal life, to acquire the unfamiliar art of enjoying the impact of Nature and the Elements upon their own personal and unique soul?

Well! I speak with a good deal of diffidence; but my feeling is that though they cannot in their old age change the man-acquired quality



of their reactions to Nature, they can endow — and the result of this attempt may well prove a wondrous *vita nuova* — the very elements themselves with a spirit of masculine personality, such as, in its arbitrariness, capriciousness, roughness and even cruelty, will have the power of rousing that traditional feminine response which captivates men so much, and to which, so she may gradually come to feel, these sub-human forces are themselves not altogether indifferent.

The depersonalized science of our era will, of course, assure her to the contrary; but the immemorial traditions of our race are riddled with hints that there was a time when the gods of earth, sea, and air shared an enamoured reciprocity with the responsive daughters of men.

Summing it all up then, in nothing, so it seems to me, is the infinite gulf between the sexes more startlingly revealed than in the difference between old women and old men in their attitude to Nature.

Contrary to what anybody might expect, and in absolute opposition to what most writers and artists assume, I am tempted to declare with dogmatic assurance that there is far less difference between man and man than between woman and woman in this response to the magical motions of the enchanted stuff out of which our Dimension is made.

The 'common or garden' man, and this applies to all the social classes in Britain, regards Nature with the eye of a would-be conqueror, a sporting invader, a wary explorer. His attitude from first to last is both detached and predatory. It is a very simple attitude; but, like other simple things it can be shown to be composed of an extraordinary number of separate ingredients.

If any reader is inclined to question what I am now saying, let such an one imagine an ordinary labouring man, a city clerk, a farm hand, a factory worker, or any doctor or lawyer or business-man of his acquaintance setting out to his place of work or on his professional or commercial rounds. What sort of a glance — I ask you, reader — will he cast upon the sky above him, upon the earth beneath him, upon any sunshine, or moonshine or flickering fireshine, upon any river, or lake, or pond, or seashore, he may encounter?

Will it not be, essentially and entirely, the glance of a dominator, the glance of a plunderer? Every man is a cave man *manqué*; and the primary, basic, spontaneous look that every man flings upon Nature as he crosses his threshold is the glance of a ravisher.

The most coarse-grained and tough-skinned of men, as he casually takes in the 'view' — such as it may be — between his door and his workshop embraces the sky, the earth, the clouds, the sunshine, the air, the puddles by the wayside, as if each of these Inanimates were a responsive manifestation and living extension of the essential femininity of Nature.

But the second thought, or rather the second instinctive motion, of an ordinary man emerging from his cave, is the impulse of the hunter, the fowler, the fisherman, the trapper, the tamer, the stalker, the explorer, the collector, the adventurer, the pioneer.

Every man has his own approach, his own especial *pounce* upon the Great Mother of us all. This is his secret passion, his double-life, his personal escape from the tedium of his job, in a word his *hobby*. Why is our own Island *par excellence*, the paradise of men? Because in Britain men, as opposed to women, have had their complete fling!

Women are perhaps even more at the mercy of the male, and more — how shall I put it? — tamed and subjected in Germany; but the special nature of their subjection there only proves that the individual German has never been allowed by the authorities his real masculine fling such as men enjoy it in Britain.

It is an essential part of the normal caveman's character to want to *share his hobbies with his mate*. Your Britisher is by temperament and tradition a Nature-ravisher, a Nature-explorer, in a word a *Naturalist*; and whatever amateurish hobby may be his individual mania, he wants his girl, his mate, *even his mother*, to share it with him.

Women in our Island, young and old alike, are compelled if they want — as all women do — to be all in all to their mate — to commit a grievous and basic outrage upon their own essential feminine being. The ordinary eternal female, to be completely and entirely herself, needs her lover's special and concentrated attention. Now since every man in this Island is brought up to have what is now called an Œdipean Complex for Nature — and Nature, after all, is an essentially feminine Manifestation — all the women of our Mother-Land have from the start an overpowering Rival; and all they can do, and every aspect of our tradition in every class, every aspect of our education in every class, encourages them in this self-outrage, is to mutilate their essential being and deny its basic need. They are forced in fact to *make themselves over*. They are driven to dress, to feel, to speak, to *think* even, as men do. What their lovers and sons

and husbands and brothers want from them isn't an idol for civilized and concentrated adoration, but what all barbaric cave men want, a sympathetic and docile mate in the cult for the Great Mother.

And the 'higher', as custom compels us to put it, the woman's 'class' may be, the more completely is she victimized in this manner.

Our British aristocracy is essentially *an aristocracy of men*. That is where we differ from the French; and as for the German aristocracy, *they* are simply distorted specialists, arrogantly industrious experts, narrow-minded professionals, compared with our anarchical, amateurish, and most fortunate ruling class.

We have to confess the truth that all over the world, women, old or young, are doomed to play completely different parts in the circus of Life according to the race, nation, or geographical situation in which they happen to be born.

In their inherent character as women, left, as they so rarely are, *to themselves*, they tend to enjoy their life most completely and to realize themselves most completely in the company of other women rather than in that of men. The exceptions to this are when the mate they have made, or the son they have made, belongs to that particular type of male who has got something of the woman in his own soul.

Why are American women the most freely developed and the most original and interesting of all the women in the world? Henry James calls them the aristocracy of America; but they differ from our aristocracy, which is essentially one of men, by the striking fact that whereas our aristocratic men — true barbarian cave men beneath their traditional courtesies — insist on their women sharing their life, the American woman, like the American man, is most herself when she is with members of her own sex. And in this she is the true universal woman of our planet. She thinks, talks, dresses, eats, drinks, and amuses herself, most spontaneously and freely among, and for, *other women*.

All this leads but to one conclusion; namely that the old lady who is the happiest here in Britain possesses what I have presumed to call the fourth type of feminine temperament, the temperament between whose powers of enjoyment and her fatal environment floats the atmospheric medium of her father's, her son's, her brother's, her lover's, her husband's instinctive tastes! And these tastes she has so completely adopted that *her* tragedy comes when, with the loss of her man or her men, she is flung

back upon her own deeply-buried feminine resources. It is for this reason that a wise counsellor, concerned with the happiness of an old lady of the type, should, I feel, persuade her to transfer to the incalculable and formidable elements of Nature something of that male atmosphere in dealing with which she has come to be most at home.

'But,' you may object, 'isn't Nature herself — for you insist we instinctively say *herself* — essentially feminine? Isn't she every woman's rival? Hasn't she always been, as "the Great Mother", the object of her man-child's most sacred cult?'

This argument has its weight; but I cannot feel that the destiny of our man-made old woman, when left to her own devices, is quite as hopeless as this!

It must be remembered that the immemorial human myth that makes Nature feminine ought, strictly speaking, to be narrowed down to *the Earth*. Demeter and Cybele were ... not embodiments of the whole Dimension in which we live. There is also the Sky! From of old the heavens have been regarded as representing the male principle of cosmic life, not only distinct from the maternal fecundity of the earth but the creative and efficient cause why the earth is prolific.

Let our lonely old woman, then, flirt with the winds, feel herself loved by the sun, diffuse her identity and satisfy her masochism by submitting herself to the all-powerful, the all-cruel, the all-tender domination of unbounded Space! Let her seek to regard what honest John Morley calls the 'last appalling stroke of annihilation' with the trembling ecstacy of a bride ready to lose herself in the final ravishment of the eternal Silence.

## OLD AGE AND THE INNER LIFE

To turn from the specifically feminine response to Nature to that of old age in general, my reader must remember that though I would regard it as the subtlest possible praise if a critic said that I myself resembled an old woman it is *not* as a woman that destiny has decided that I should be. I can play Tiresias as well as another, as all writers must do if they are to wrestle with the double-faced riddle, but I feel that to base our analysis on the narrower ground of one's own sex places one on a firmer vantage-ground, a more massive Chesil-Beach, as it were, of observation, than is possible when surrounded by the shifting ocean-sands of a sympathetic imagination.

It seems as if where all these tentative psychological investigations are concerned such as hover between the parallel consciousness of the two sexes it were wiser to 'look into one's own heart' than to generalize from the liveliest external impressions. Indeed it is likely enough that there are more elements of feminine consciousness in the actual feelings of any man than can be reached from the outside by the closest scrutiny.

And if this be so it is also likely enough that the best methods which a man has found out for himself and in himself of dealing with the problem of old age will be found of much more use to women — who can translate such methods into their own language — than all he can say in presumptuous sympathy dictated by a necessarily limited experience.

If as a man, then, I try to discover what is the wisest direction in which elderly persons can use their will in this matter of dealing with Nature I find myself — for this is the way a man's mind works! — thrown back upon the old question — mockery though it sounds in these desperate days — about an ultimate oracle for human *morale*. In ancient China the subtler Taoist masters derided the simple Confucian imperative of 'Benevolence and Righteousness'; and I suppose there *is* an inward necessity for something that deals more intimately than this with the soul's attitude to itself. For myself I am in favour of the Mark Tapley-like gesture — only I would endow it with a little more metaphysical unction! — of

*forcing myself to enjoy myself* under the more adverse as well as under the less adverse conditions. This of course isn't a trick learnt over night. It needs obstinate and constant training. But it is a mysterious and magical power and under particular conditions it might be called a miraculous power

Whether Nature endows us with it or whether it springs from outside Nature is part of its mystery. It is certainly a power belonging to that region of experience where the distinction between what we call selfishness and unselfishness vanishes away. In any human crisis, in any mortal extremity, the use of this power has an effect that transcends our personal identity

Judging from various experiences that fate has allowed me I confess I am myself tempted to hold the view that this power, when we have struggled to tap it, surges up in us from a portion of our soul that not only transcends our immediate personality but transcends the weight and pressure of this whole temporal-spatial astronomical cosmos! In other words I have myself a curious inkling that it reaches us from another Dimension of the Multiverse.

At any rate we may all agree that it reaches us from the depths of our own being, whether this being is limited to our present Dimension of Experience or not.

In the practice and training of this power, whether limited or unlimited by Time and Space, an element of what is usually called 'faith' is essential. for it is clear that the practice of this 'will-power', if it is lawful to use that familiar word in this connection, implies the faith that such 'will-power' exists; and that it can, however great the difficulty, work its magic.

Whatever the metaphysical implications may be of our Mark Tapley-like notion that true philosophy consists in forcing ourselves to enjoy ourselves under the worst and as well as the best conditions, old age must be admitted to have an advantage over youth in the mere fact of being superannuated and 'hors-de-combat'.

It remains that in this matter of our relations with Nature the grand 'desideratum' isn't so much leisure to look about us as leisure for our souls to sink into what we look at.

Apart from the present 'war-effort', conscripting the whole nation, very few people, in peace or in war, have time for the sort of concentra-

tion upon Nature that I am suggesting. Each is occupied in his own affairs and these affairs brim over the edge and leap out of the bottom of their appointed hours!

In the services and out of the services we all have our holidays and our hobbies; but what with our business and our training and our professional duties and our practical occupations and all the energy required for our trade or our craft it is very few of us who have the heart or the spirit to reduce so anxious and so harassed a consciousness to the worship of Nature.

But the very limitations of old age come to our rescue at last: and with the sagacity of a man we can once more enjoy the sensations of an infant. We can once more live that divine life of pure contemplation, which is the life of plants and planets and supermen and gods, and which all along has been the secret craving of our soul's inmost being, and of which the occasional excitement of love and religion and philosophy and art have been merely captivating and tantalizing premonitions!

If the underlying purpose of life is to enjoy life it is certainly a purpose that youth and middle-age — and not only in these days of war — are constantly forced to forgo; but old age gives us an opportunity to fulfil this purpose.

In our Pilgrim's Progress towards this Paradise Regained what was unconsciously achieved by infancy can now, if we only keep our wits about us, be consciously realized by old age.

The most intense as well as the most lasting enjoyment possible to man is not to be attained through love or lust or power or possession or action, but through a very special sort of sensation, the sensation of embracing the whole Inanimate Mystery of which our present Dimension is composed. The issue has been confused by the perilous stuff of conscience, that fatal side-tracker of the purpose of life, a purpose which was, is, and must ever be, individualistic.

Everything in our present Dimension is made up of contraries and opposites, both of which are necessary; and at the deepest level of our life-consciousness the two opposite impulses — and, as I keep hunting, they both feel as if they reached us from beyond Time and Space — are the impulse to embrace what in our ignorance of further Dimensions we erroneously call the Cosmos, and the impulse to wash our hands of ourselves and to help other entities to embrace it. *Enjoy all: be kind to all.*

This in fact is our ultimate life-gesture and the profoundest possible motion of our living will.

And that it should be a double-edged movement, and one that includes both the selfish and the unselfish impulse, proves that it is what we want. It must be remembered that we have already excluded all practical and outward action. This ultimate selfish-unselfish gesture must therefore be of the nature of a contemplative vision, or to put it so as to include all our senses, a contemplative embrace, of what we call the Cosmos.

Now human life is such that at every moment of our consciousness we are aware of some other entities who are in distress or discomfort or even in extreme pain.

The present war has increased this suffering, multiplied it, given it an almost infinite variety of shapes, shapes physical, mental, emotional, general and particular; but the suffering was here before the war and will be here after the war; for to suffer a little, to suffer much, to suffer more than we dare think about — there is no escape in this Dimension of the Multiverse from one or other of these destinies.

But just as our present life creaks and groans, oscillates and ricochets, weeps and wrestles, gathers itself tightly or dissipates itself loosely, under this infernal pressure, so it responds, so it recognizes the opportunity for response, to the animate and inanimate essences and substances that surround us.

If one side of our dual and self-contradictory life-purpose is to enjoy ourselves, the other side is to enable others to do the same. And here we reach the crux of the whole problem, namely how to reconcile these two 'streams of tendency', so that they shall intensify each other and not cancel or neutralize each other.

A considerable portion of the discomfort, and often the sheer misery, of our struggles to reach some interior adjustment between these contradictory urges can be allayed by a drastic and honest recognition of their opposite and equal claims; and what I think should be kept clearly in view is the importance of constantly practising, in our private thoughts as well as in our outward actions, this necessary balance.

Of course in the rough-and-tumble of the world's confusions we are assisted in keeping this balance by the necessities of practical life. Our ordinary existence, especially when economic pressure is intensified, sees to it only too well that we divide our life-urge between fighting for our



own hand and planning for the comfort of those dependent upon us. Social tradition, racial habit, religious piety, family attachment, common loyalty, all these things combine to restrict our independent and egoistic impulses by a thousand invisible threads; threads that are more difficult for the old to break than for the young.

But for all of us the pressure exists; and it can usually be safely left to custom and necessity to see to it that we keep the path. On the other hand the weakness and infirmity of age is in itself, as we know, a sort of Ticket of Leave from the more exacting exigencies of the struggle for existence.

What cannot be left to itself, but on the contrary must be constantly intensified and heightened by our individual will, is the use we make of those leisure moments which are entirely and most legitimately our own. Concentration of this sort, especially when it is a further accompaniment of response to social pressure, cannot be acquired without long practice.

Every individual soul differs radically as well as superficially from every other; and thus in addition to the mysterious gulf between all men and all women.

Didactic writers should always remember that unlike the supreme soothsayers who are mediums for what each man shares with all men, *their* more limited message is of necessity appreciated only by kindred spirits. The nearer their views approximate to the deeper, simpler, and less transitory vision of the great geniuses of our race the less of a special 'school' both they and their hearers will become.

Resembling one another in the comprehensiveness of their mediumship each one of the supreme masters has always been a discoverer of some new and as yet untried vista of revelation.

But such masters are never professional philosophers and when we come to the strictly philosophical realm we descend to a lower level altogether and a much more confused and confusing one. Century by century our human response to life has scarcely been affected at all — certainly not in essentials — by these academic 'great thinkers'.

The significance of *their* discoveries is always reached, not, as with Rabelais and Montaigne and Shakespeare and Cervantes and Goethe, by the harmonious weight of a well-balanced nature, but by some single irrational flash of insight which is afterwards fortified, buttressed-up, smoothed-over and made seductive by the use, often tricky and treacherous, of some special artfulness in rhetoric and logic. The single flash of

imaginative insight is rendered in this manner more elaborate and plausible, but we may legitimately suspect, less essentially true.

We might indeed maintain that the further our great thinker advances in rational and æsthetic elaboration the more he loses touch with the magical Fount from which his original inspiration sprang. Returning however to the question of questions, as to what is the most effective way — in the solitary and secret motions of our individual mind — to blend the self-urge with the selfless urge, I might suggest the following harmless practical expedient.

Suppose you are confronted, either in the course of a walk, or, if your peripatetic powers have been curtailed, as you put down your book and glance out of the window, by some exceptionally attractive twilight. I use this example, not only because of its universal recognition as a beguiling natural phenomenon, but because it is a manifestation that can be seen anywhere, in the streets, from factory windows, from the balconies of hospitals, from the trim parterres of the gardens of lunatic asylums, quite as easily as in rural solitudes.

Well! let us suppose, and it is a supposition that implies no unusual philosophic or æsthetic sensitivity that you, as an old man or an old woman, are suddenly carried out of yourself as you gaze upon this twilight, by a sensation of ineffable sweetness combined with the sense that what you are now feeling has been enjoyed by many others long ago.

What you feel is not a mere response to beauty. It is much more than that; though like a thousand other subtle and indescribable sensations it comes at one time or another to all men born. It is a mood that contains the secretest essence of religion and the secretest essence of heroic victory over evil. It is a mood at once selfish and selfless; and as you yield to it you find yourself instinctively flinging into space a magnetic current from the very depths of your being, a current that seeks out all the unhappy sufferers upon earth so as to share with them what has reached you from this unusual twilight.

The whole question as to the particular attitude which for an old man or old woman it were wise to adopt with regard to Nature is intimately mingled with the philosophical phenomenon I have presumed — stealing the phrase, though giving it a wider significance, from Ibsen's 'Wild-Duck' — to name our *Life-Illusion*.

What I mean by this singular phrase is the particular attitude we adopt

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to our essential personality which satisfies, comforts, soothes, and gives us an irrational pride and peace beneath all the changes and chances of our fate.

Now I am particularly anxious at this point to carry my reader's attention with me and to convince him of the truth of what I am trying to put into words; for not only is it the key to my present argument but from my own point of view it is the underground Dam to the whole mysterious millstream of our life-enjoyment, fed by the fountain of our faith in our power of self-healing.

Let me therefore, at the risk of seeming over-meticulous, implore my reader to follow me once again in my analysis of this great word. Our life-illusion then is that fundamental and basic attitude to ourselves which enables us to pluck up our spirits and keep our head under disappointments, insults, defeats, humiliations, failures, disasters.

Now the worst shocks that happen to our conceit of ourselves and to our pride in ourselves are obviously the particular shock over which we tend to brood *when we are alone*, that is to say when we are surrounded by what we call, perhaps erroneously, the Inanimate. This Inanimate may be bounded by four walls: it may be glimpsed through panes of glass; it may be embraced under the open sky: but it is composed of all those aspects of earth: air, water, and fire, which unscientifically but not unphilosophically we call the chemistry of Nature.

And my point is that certain shocks to our inmost soul, whether they be loss of habitual companions, or loss of customary surroundings, or — and this final blow is the subject of our present consideration — loss of our deepest respect for ourselves, have the dreadful power of disturbing and even destroying our normal reaction to this sacred and healing chemistry of Nature.

Hit by this loss of our inherent self-respect we feel ourselves to be so ridiculous, so weak, so abject, so vicious, so cowardly, so criminal, so treacherous, so ignoble, so contemptible, that 'there is no spirit left in us', no response to Nature, no will to enjoy Nature, no heart to give ourselves up to the healing influences of earth and heaven.

Well! In this unhappy condition, as in the case of so many other crises, the best thing to do is to make one drastic leap down to the very bottom of humiliation! Having reached the bottom we shall find that it will be Nature herself — always kind to those who in the words that

excite Herr Keyserling's proudest contempt, cry: 'Kick me but let me live!' — who will help us to pick ourselves up.

But we have 'harrowed' Hell; and henceforth no external humiliation, no internal self-laceration can plunge us any lower. We are now indeed, in our own view of ourselves as well as in what we feel to be the view of the world, sunk to that deep-sea level for which the Bardic Dictionary of the Welsh, who are the most introverted of all peoples, has the curious word — probably interpreted by his Druidic friend to Cæsar Julius Caesar — the word *abred*. Well! We can now take stock of our situation in a fresh and new way. Both to ourselves and to the world at large we are now no better than the little green grub that hides itself in what is usually called 'Cuckoo-spit'. As the unequalled Gogol would put it, we are 'encumberers of the earth'.

Very well then. If *that* is what we are, let us boldly and shamelessly accept the situation! We, an abject and contemptible failure, we, a wretched and helpless criminal, we, a laughing-stock for all well-constituted persons, can turn round quietly now, even as the poorest blind-worm can 'turn', and enjoy once again the roar of the wind, the rustle of the leaves, the roll of the waves, the lights and shadows on the dust-heap, the waving grasses, the scattered stones!

It will depend on the quality of our imagination whether the feeling that we are on a level with the weakest offspring of planetary life gives us — in addition to the lifting up of our own heart — a never-before-experienced thrill of melting tenderness for all these fellow-entities, children of the same Great Mother, who are as helpless, and often as vicious and mean and cowardly, as we are ourselves!

It must be remembered that with us old men, and I have an inkling that this applies to old women too, though with a difference, the thing that I keep calling our 'life-illusion' — that is to say our inmost, secretest, personal respect for ourselves — is just as much a necessary background to our present state as it was in our livelier youth or in our more energetic middle-age.

And it is still more important now — owing to our manifold weaknesses and infirmities — to keep it inviolable to all shocks and to strip it of all pretence and assumption. Get it down — that is the clue-word — to the lowest and simplest level you possibly can! I don't mean that we should yield up one jot of our natural and legitimate pride in being ourselves.

Pride of this sort is twin-brother to that planetary humility which is our sublimest *novum organum* of wisdom.

What I mean is that we should have the pride, just as we have the courage, of our inherent limitations. And it is here that Nature, with her primordial elements of earth, air, fire, and water, plays so mysterious a part. For there are only four things that render our Life-Illusion absolutely indifferent to the Opinion of the World and completely impervious to our blunders and failures in the Struggle for Existence; and these four things are: absorption in books; devotion to a cause; some special erotic obsession; and the cultivation of a life of pure sensation. Of these four the last-mentioned is the only one completely within the power of an ordinary person's will.

Oh, what misery we escape, what heart-burnings, what disappointments, what bitterness, what pessimism, what tragic humiliation, by living in our immediate sensations, in place of competing with others or depending on the love, admiration, esteem of others, or on our position in society and our achievements in the Great World!

It is in fact by the cultivation of this one particular sort of sensation, that is by growing more and more porous to the elements, more and more aware of the elements, more and more capable of enjoying the elements, that we acquire the confidence, the courage, the assurance to be shamelessly ourselves; and it is only by being shamelessly ourselves that we are able — especially in old age — thoroughly to enjoy ourselves.

Why is it that the particular persons, whom we are in the habit of calling 'celebrities', are often found to be so much more easy, natural, and unselfconscious than the majority of us?

The answer is an obvious one. Simply because these people — lucky in this if in nothing else — have had their inmost Life-Illusion artificially blown up, like the rubber tyre of a wheel, by the air-pump of public opinion.

The same thing is being much more subtly done for every husband by every wife, and in a measure for every man by every woman, while to some of us the most wonderful thing in human character is how women themselves, women who may be neither strikingly beautiful nor exceptionally clever, manage to protect their own Life-Illusion and keep it from falling flat like a tyre with an incurable puncture, while they are engaged in pumping new life into their man.

My own suspicion is that women are so much nearer Nature than men, and so much less detached from the pressure of practical events and the unregenerate chemistry of Matter, that without making any particular effort they find it easier than we do, born actresses though they are, to be themselves *to themselves*. Between a man and the stream of life, especially between an old man and the stream of life, there supervene all manner of paddings, all manner of moral, political, scientific, conventional coats of mail. His very hobbies are like opaque shields to keep reality at a safe distance!

And all this masculine soul-padding intervenes — unless, as with artists, he has a tincture of the feminine in him — not only between the old man and the stream of life, but between the old man and his own soul.

I would in fact go so far as to say that while a woman's Life-Illusion makes warm and supple and thick and soft her most intimate skin, a man's covers *his* skin like an easily scratched varnish or pigment!

Well then! And what is our conclusion from all this? Our conclusion is that while women can afford to remain what William James and my friend Captain White call once-born, men must be twice-born. In plainer language they must reach by a deliberate cultivation the sort of proud humility which comes natural to women, and which is absolutely essential if they are to face their own soul and their own senses, and get their Life-Illusion down to the ground, where it can neither fall any lower nor be punctured by any sharp flint of reality when it takes to the road!

I am inclined sometimes to fancy — and I wonder whether any of my readers will vouch for the truth of this — that although her Life-Illusion fits her so much tighter than a man's, fits her in fact like her own skin, and indeed may be, for all I know, an actual outer-layer of her skin, a woman has much less satisfaction than a man has, in spite of his external absorption in what Byron calls 'the court, the camp, the grove', in brooding over her Life-Illusion.

It is perhaps for this reason that women are so much bolder and more reckless than men in the expression of their likes and dislikes. It would seem as if the honey and gall of their immediate reactions actually obliterate the consistency of their habitual attitude to themselves; a consistency that men rarely forget.

A woman's personal dignity seems unaffected — sometimes it seems even increased — by these spontaneous outbursts; whereas a certain

weight of self-importance, a certain subconsciousness of himself as an unique character — no one exactly like him on the whole earth; as of course is true of all of us! — with his whims, his caprices, his prejudices, his opinions, all very much 'in evidence', makes a man, especially an elderly man, more premeditated in his reactions.

But apart from our uneasy awareness of our position in the community, an awareness that women carry off so much more easily than men, what militates more than anything else against our feeling for Nature and distracts and disturbs us most of all in our intermittent attempts to enjoy what has been called 'cosmic emotion' are the worries and interruptions of a gregarious life. Both sexes suffer from these worries, which are the more disturbing in proportion as they involve the making of decisions.

When calamities reach us from outside and are the sort of catastrophes that must — like 'acts of God' or tragic turns of the wheel of Fate — be endured passively, they seem to interrupt our enjoyment of Nature less than when we are compelled to make difficult and momentous decisions.

And it is because of their lifelong immersion in the sort of domestic worries which demand perpetual decisions and re-decisions that old women, even when practically superannuated, are more disturbed in their enjoyment of these primordial sensations than old men.

The real truth is that women are never superannuated. And though their bodies are more susceptible to the elements and their responses to Nature more porous, their concern with economic worries is so instinctive that, though the decisions to be made are no longer in their hands, they are much less able to detach themselves from these things than old men, whose hobbies and politics and theories and dogmas and past achievements serve as so many Jacob's Ladders let down from heaven in the ascent of which these diurnal worries are left behind.

It often happens, however, that these very hobbies themselves tend to distract certain types of old men from that pure and simple enjoyment of the Elements which I am advocating.

Is it not strange that this one profound and infinite human satisfaction, which nothing can take away, the satisfaction of merging ourselves in the Inanimate, should demand such a special kind of concentration?

Spinoza says as his final word that the best things are the most difficult;

and I suppose he is right. But that the best things are the nearest, commonest, simplest things is also true; and that there should be this paradox at the heart of our present topic is itself a proof that we are on the right track. All the working, pragmatic, fluid 'truths' of life contain a contradiction of this kind. 'He who is not with us is against us' remains the one side of the shield; while 'He who is not against us is with us' remains the other!

Unless our philosophy is self-contradictory at its very root it is bound to be false. 'My yoke is easy' has always to be placed side by side with 'Who then *can* be saved?'

To acquire the art of embracing with an almost erotic satisfaction and with the whole ardour of our complicated human sensibility what science assures us we ought to regard as mere electric force, or as the motions of atoms, or as the vibrations of energy, or as what they call 'quanta', does indeed appear a fantastical and inhuman undertaking.

But considered practically and realistically, what could be more to our purpose as conscious entities in a Dimension created as this one is created out of the interplay of Time and Space, than to divide these ultimates; and while we arrange, like Mr. Shandy in the winding of his clock, to make Time our Pandar, to concentrate on the other?

Each one of us is ultimately, to himself, or to herself, a lonely and unique consciousness. And of what is this lonely consciousness aware, beyond and below all other feelings, beyond all other ideas and experiences if not of the pressure of what used to be called *Matter*?

And how does this 'matter' press upon us? Does it not do so in the shape of pain and pleasure, intermittently experienced, and mingled with each other in varied proportions?

Alone with this strange whirling of mysterious forces that in our ignorance of anything outside it we so preposterously honour with the name of 'Universe', is not the primary impression we receive that of a vast amalgam of unfathomable 'matter', made up of electrical vibrations if you must have it so, but in any case inhabited by other conscious entities more or less resembling ourselves, in whose pleasure and whose pain on the analogy of our own we are forced to believe?

A certain number of these other selves are bound closely to us in familiar and inescapable ties; others, though linked with our destiny, are a little further removed. All are actuated by attractions and repulsions,



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all are pleasure-causing and pain-causing, as indeed are the great elemental forces themselves that surround both them and us.

*Nature* is the true name and 'the Universe' is the false name that we have come to give to the total weight and pressure of this multiple and multifarious congeries in adjustment to which consists the secret of the inner life of Old Age.

## OLD AGE AND THE ELEMENTS

WE saw in the last chapter that Nature is not merely the landscape that we observe from our windows when we live in what we call 'the country', nor is it merely the sky and the air and the patches of verdure of which we catch glimpses when we live in the town. It is the total volume of all the Space, about us, indissolubly welded to the Mystery of Time.

And we must take it to include all the artificial products of men's hands every one of which in the final analysis is a portion of the chemistry of Matter, transformed into walls and houses and pavements and roofs and chimneys and factories and warehouses and all the machinery therein contained, by the frantic and fearful energy of our race.

Our individual soul, even in the bosom of the most loving husband, or wife or child, even in the most gregarious group of fellow-workers, even among the most generous neighbours and noblest mates, is absolutely alone. However amorous it may be it cannot be embracing its true loves all the while; it cannot be embracing the idea of the nation at large, still less of humanity at large, all the while! It cannot be embracing the beauty of a particular landscape, of particular trees, flowers, rivers, seas, all the while.

However avid and greedy the senses may be through which it satisfies its sexual desires and gratifies its hungers and thirsts, it cannot be enjoying these things all the while.

What, in its absolute loneliness then, can it embrace, enjoy, and forget itself in, *sans cesse*? Into what can it plunge at any single second, when its attention wanders from its work or its play or its business or its newspaper and be at peace and satisfied? Spinoza faced this question boldly enough, only what he wanted was the satisfaction of emotional love rather than desire. He referred us to an unfathomable, eternal, unchangeable, and entirely unresponsive Power, who, if he is beyond this universe and if his modes and his attributes make up an 'ensemble' totally beyond our ken, is also so absolutely identical with this universe that even we, creatures of an hour, are parts and parcels of him and are sharers of his immortal life.

It was to find an unchanging and eternal object of 'love' that the soul of this great Jew set out on its tremendous quest; and I confess there seems a rather desolate irony in the fact that when the result is finally reduced to its essence we are confronted by such withering negations as: 'He who loves God does not expect that God shall love him in return', and, 'Our love for God is only a portion of the infinite love with which God loves himself'.

To a mathematical mind this universal God of Spinoza is doubtless a more rational as well as a more dignified object of 'love' than the Jehovah of the Bible; but whether it is nearer reality than the anthropomorphic demiurge of our present Dimension is open to considerable doubt. It is certainly lacking in the huge, generous, gracious, genial uncton of the Pantagruelian Giver of all good in Rabelais!

But words are slippery and treacherous. They are like those undeveloped eels that swim back in shoals from the Saragossa Sea to their native stream in Ultima Thule. And as they swim they twist and turn; and as they turn, lo! how their silvery sides reflect a galaxy of flickering rainbows!

Well! In our modest roundabout way we must endeavour to keep as close a contact with the movements of the real living thought-flame as the swimming eel-spawn does with the broken sun-ray and yet not lose the magic pull of our native pool!

*What do the sensations feel like* which are experienced by our inner self when it sets out to describe its absolutely lonely and yet absolutely surrounded centre of self-consciousness? Here *we* are; and *there*, surrounding us on every side, and pressing in upon us from every side, is that 'other-than-we', that 'not-us', that ubiquitous, omnipresent *Not-Self* whose appearance seems to come simultaneously with the awakening of any self-consciousness at all!

There are, it would seem, certain inescapable processes to be passed through in this analysis. In the first place we are merely aware that the 'I' in us — a self that continues in the same integrity and identity from moment to moment — is feeling itself to be itself and saying to itself 'I am myself'.

The question arises here: Is the mystery of Time and Space involved at the very start in this primary awareness? I am tempted to say *that it is*; though I confess it seems possible to imagine oneself as pure conscious-

ness in an absolute void, dividing itself into a primal duality, as the observing and the observed.

But whether or not the mystery of Time and Space is, in some faint and subtle manner, as I suspect it of being, involved in the very first stage of an analysis of our self-consciousness it is certainly involved in the second stage.

In the first stage, even if Time and Space *are* there, they are logically concealed, and we *can*, as minds in a void, say to ourselves: yes, you are myself, old friend, for though I cannot see, feel, hear, touch, or taste you, I am conscious that you are 'I', and that you have been and will be 'I', although existing in an absolute void!

The moment however we cease, for philosophical purposes, trying to clear our mind of all its spatial and temporal content, the moment, that is to say, we permit our senses to function normally and freely, any analysis we make of such a consciousness at work is bound to introduce a more palpable pressure of Time and Space than is present in the faint simulacra of these things which is all that is necessary as the primary condition and framework of thought.

It is curious to note how far we move in that first mental leap from the self's primary consciousness of itself in what at least we feel to be a relative 'void', though it is only too likely that with the thought of any conceivable 'void' the inescapable background of Time and Space modestly but obstinately slips into position.

The moment we turn outwards from this leap-frog of self with self we find ourselves confronted by a most complicated and, indeed, I wouldn't hesitate to say a most elaborate vision of things!

For now, rushing precipitously upon our consciousness in one grand sweep, we have our own individual body; we have the boundless objective, material mass of our present temporal-spatial Dimension; we have our own physical objective body; and we have a vast number of *other selves*, both human and sub-human, each with its own body and each, as we assume from analogy with ourselves, with its own more-or-less-conscious interior self.

Upon this vast world-spectacle our particular, individual consciousness looks forth; and the interesting thing is that it can still, without the least necessity of isolating itself in a void, feel itself to be an integral and self-conscious self capable of thinking 'I am I' either in complete isolation or

as contrasted with other living entities whether human or sub-human, or finally as opposed to the boundless material, chemical, ethereal mass of the four Inanimate Elements.

Now it is in connection with the relation between this inner self of ours, uttering its basic axiom of 'I am I' over-against its own body and over-against all other selves in all other bodies and over-against this boundless conglomeration of Inanimate Elements, that old age has its grand and culminating advantage over middle age and youth; indeed over all its rival periods in a person's life except babyhood.

But I would go further still. I am prepared to maintain that the sole, single and unique relation between a human being and his present environment which could be called, though the expression sounds paradoxical, an *absolute relation* is this one between the 'self' and the boundless mass of surrounding 'not-self' which we have come to call the Inanimate. Youth and middle-age are distracted from the Inanimate by a thousand needs, wants, necessities, duties, obligations, responsibilities, quests, pleasures, rivalries, adventures, passions, curiosities, ambitions, plots, schemes, and sports.

The only serious rivals that old age may be said to have in this cult of the Inanimate — apart from infants — are invalids, especially bedridden ones. These last are naturally and by common christian consent discharged from all human responsibilities save the simple ones of stoic endurance and considerate civility.

But when it comes to the deepest morality of all, I mean the morality of forcing oneself to enjoy oneself under all conditions and of forcing oneself to behave properly to others under all conditions; where I say, our whole moral duty is reduced to the effort of appropriating to oneself every flicker of light, turn of wind, flight of cloud, stir of dust, fall of leaf, discernible through the window, or from the balcony, or through a crack in the door, or round the hood of a perambulator, all three of these classes of human entities have an immeasurable advantage over the rest of us.

And it must be allowed, moreover, that old age has the best of it over babies and invalids in the fact that while nearly as free from responsibility as they are it can change its landscape and alter its vista of elements in a much freer manner than is permitted to these more helpless elementalists.

But oh! the escape from the appalling debt we owe to our fellow-men

that is offered by the inanimate or sub-animate! The more we learn to eat it, drink it, ravish it, be ravished by it, fuse with it, merge with it, sink into it, lose ourselves in it, the more fully we shall possess our souls in peace, the better will our solitude be protected and our subtlest egoism fulfilled.

And this disciplined lust for the elements can be satisfied in a town almost as well as in the country. In her more conventional attributes what we call Nature is hard to come at in thickly-populated cities, not to mention mines and factories and workshops.

But the elements which compose our planetary world and which are the chemical substance of the life of plants and of rocks and rivers and winds and of the unthinkable totality of ethereal space are *not* hard to come at but are always to be reached, in the most desolate slum, in the noisiest factory, in the deepest mine, in the most crowded office

These are present in every inanimate substance around us, in every flicker of fire, in every breath of air, in every brick and stone, and above all in the lights and spaces and distances that show themselves through every square of window.

It would be ridiculous to deny that those among us who have the incredible fortune — a fortune that it is monstrous not to share and divide among all — to live where 'Nature', in the conventional sense of that word, is close at hand, are at present marvellously lucky; but where chance or fate or society has been unjust the shrewdly calculating soul has its own tricks for making the best of the worst.

Man's life is a war from start to finish, and the most powerful and most beneficent of all Deities is the great goddess Chance. 'Save us O *Tyche Sōteer*! Help and defend us, O Chance the Saviour!'

Whether or not, as some hold, we are born into this world from another Dimension, it is certain that all we enjoy, all we possess, all we *are*, in this present life, whether as strangers and pilgrims, or as autochthonous natives, all that we live by, live for, and live on, we draw and derive from Nature! *All except the soul*. But it is a shrewd protection against the less kindly moods of Chance, to learn the art of concentrating on Nature's Elements, rather than on her more highly organized evocations.

It is also a shrewd trick, if chance *does* bring her in her conventional aspect of trees and grass and flowers and beautifully arranged landscapes to our very doors, to concentrate *even yet* chiefly and particularly upon

these same elements of air, water, earth, and fire, rather than upon her more living beauty. And this is the wiser course just because these beguiling aspects of her Presence attract us more spontaneously and inevitably than the simpler elements.

But there arises another important point in regard to Nature herself; for it seems to me that when it comes to these more beguiling aspects the wiser course is to concentrate on Nature's *vegetable world*, her world of grass and trees and flowers and mosses and ferns and reeds and lichens and toadstools, rather than upon her multitude of more highly organized living creatures.

For just as grass and trees and flowers naturally attract us more than the common air and the common sun and more than the ordinary wayside mud with its pools of water, so the cry of the cuckoo, the murmur of the dove, the swoop of the hawk, the flight of the heron, the hoot of the owl, not to speak of a snake in the path, a fox on the hillside, a group of cattle standing in the river, a mare and her foal racing round a field, a salmon leaping a waterfall, a herd of deer behind park-rails, a squirrel chattering from a branch, a hedgehog curled up in the ditch, naturally arrest our attention more spontaneously than the weeds and grass and roots and moss and hedges across which we see and hear them.

All these various furred and scaled and feathered cousins of ours, with their shapes and their ways, so different from our own, strike our interest with a startling shock of arrest. We cannot resist their attraction.

And if to our ordinary human interest there be added a naturalist's special concern with these complicated lives, this interest is doubled.

But no dramatic interest in our fellow-creatures, no passionate recognition of the flesh-and-blood link with our planetary relatives in this stellar Dimension, no scientific fanaticism of furious biological research can rival the subtler, obscurer, and quite different life-sympathy which we experience for grass and trees and flowers and moss and ferns.

There does exist undoubtedly a deep atavistic link between us and the vegetable world; but it is a link which requires a greater intensity or concentration, a greater detachment from humanity, and a rarer purgation of the senses than to enjoy a sympathetic understanding of animals and birds.

Just as it is far easier to feel at one with the hedges and fields of the country than to note the shifting of the wind or the passage of the clouds

from the streets of a great city, so it is much easier to give ourselves up to the excitement of watching a rabbit-warren or a rookery than to the less dramatic enjoyment of walking across a dull, simple, flat, ordinary field, where there may not be so much as a sheep nibbling, a mole burrowing, a shrew-mouse surring, or a nervous peewit scolding.

'Nature' is a loose, vague, popular name that covers a great variety of human impressions. But whether used in the philosophic — cosmic — mystic sense as Goethe or Wordsworth or Emerson would use it, or used in the ordinary popular sense, Nature thus considered includes the whole weight, mass, and volume of all the multitudinous objects, animate and inanimate, brought into existence under the pressure of evolution upon this particular plane.

I fancy the majority among us are lovers in some degree of 'Nature' in both these senses; but, as Wordsworth explains, there occur, with most of us, all manner of subtle changes between infancy and old age in our relation to the visible world.

Nor is the attitude to Nature of any two persons, even in this large, loose sense of 'scenery' and 'landscape' and 'seaside', ever quite the same. Some of us, for example, are happier in peaceful, luxuriant, pastoral scenes; others in lonely, savage scenes. Some of us have a nostalgia for the sound of the sea; others, like Charles Lamb, prefer 'inland murmurs'. Some would put the harsh, the formless, the chaotic above the picturesque, while others are only moved to delight by soothing, sentimental 'picture-postcard' prettiness.

Nature in this large general sense, whether enjoyed mystically or, as Wordsworth declared he enjoyed her in his boyhood, with a passion and an appetite that had no need of a remoter charm, 'or any interest un-borrowed from the eye', appeals we may assume, with very rare exceptions, to all the children of men; but, unfortunately, in our present state of social organization, the enjoyment of Nature, in this superlative and superabundant sense, is denied to the majority among us; denied, in fact, not only to those compelled by destiny to be 'barricadoed evermore within the walls of cities', but to many whose stress of daily toil in what we call 'the country' is so severe, so monotonous, and so 'absorbing that we have little spirit left save to take all but the changes of the weather — often disastrous and devastating — for granted.

Now since none of us, old or young, can be absolutely sure of what



fate has in store for us or as to where, as they say in West Wessex, 'we'm got to bide', it is surely a matter of common sense — especially when 'our natural force is abated', to 'seek our treasure', as the Bible would put it, in that Elemental Chemistry of Nature that no city walls, no city streets, no factories, no pavements, no traffic, *no war*, can totally exclude or black out!

What, in fact, 'I make bold' to suggest to elderly people is to devote their attention, day in, day out, to a *very particular kind of enjoyment of Nature*, a kind that thrusts into the background, as far as our *will* is concerned, such aspects as the Picturesque, the Romantic, and the Scientific.

I am not for a moment suggesting that if you are a born artist the aesthetic aspect is not for you the most thrilling of all. But just *because* it is the most thrilling, it is an aspect that can safely be left to chance and the necessity of your temperament.

The same applies to the scientific aspect, if such be your bent, or to the useful or to the picturesque or the romantic. A spontaneous and irrepressible urge in ourselves will soon see to it — given only the ghost of a chance! — and that without any beating about the bush or any self-conscious cult, that we plunge — hell for leather — into these darling attractions!

The poet Wordsworth, who is still, with all his limitations, our profoundest student of these mysteries, confesses clearly enough that he required in his boyhood no mystic incentive to pursue with a passionate delight the colours and the forms of mountains, plains, rivers, and forests; the metaphysical 'presence' disturbing him with the joy of 'elevated thought' and linked up with the categorical imperative of moral duty came later.

What might roughly be called 'The Sacrament of the Elements', as I am endeavouring to indicate it here, is totally different from Wordsworth's religious mysticism; but it is, none the less, an attitude that demands a good deal of analytical self-consciousness and not a little discipline of mind and will. In all these terraqueous and helio-etheric problems of the ego's relation to the vast 'Not-Self' we shall be besotted fools if we leave to chance all those devilish hindrances to beatific vision which are thrown in our way by our physical infirmities. And how many margins and overlappings there are to be considered!

Just as the most stoical Puritan in Religion soon discovers that life is

such a tangled skein that his worship of God as a spiritual Presence is constantly being invaded by insidious approaches — impossible altogether to avoid — of rarified ritualistic and sensuous essences, so this particular cult of the commoner, more simple, more purely chemical Elements of Nature, of which we can be as fully aware in the town as in the country, is constantly finding itself, to our special good luck, agreeably and felicitously invaded by the very aspects of the Great Mother's Being the enjoyment of which we have disciplined ourselves to leave to accident and chance.

A flock of birds will cross our patch of sky; a tuft of grass, a clump of moss, will break the monotony of our brick pavement; some tiny flowering weed will catch our eye upon a familiar dump-heap; and while we are forcing ourselves with Heracletean concentration to enjoy the spurt of fire-light or gas-flame which is, as a substitute for the blazing Sun, our nearest symbol of the original creative force that built and will probably destroy the world, it is quite within the range of good fortune that a geranium petal upon the window-sill, or a sudden rustle of poplar-leaves against the pane, may open up a far-drawn vista of that world of living vegetation that we have deliberately left to the background of our thoughts.

I refuse, however, to believe that any real Nature-Lover, whether in the landscape sense or in the flora-fauna sense of that familiar appellation, will deny the deep value, even to his cult of the 'vegetable' and 'animal' worlds, of the particular discipline I am advocating.

I am indeed only suggesting that if it be his incredible good fortune to live in the country, it were wise, remembering the changes and chances of mortal life, and considering that some devilish accident might land him in a city hospital, to so arrange the trend of his habitual delight in life that such a calamity would be unable seriously to impair, far less to destroy, his fundamental *gesture of enjoyment*.

Wise were it, therefore, for us all, to look primarily on Nature, neither 'as in the hour of thoughtless youth', nor as those who demand some special pictorial beauty or some striking sublimity of scene, but with a stripped, austere, and rigorous concentration upon those everlasting aspects of the elements which are the same in a dull spot as in a romantic spot, in a tame landscape as in an exciting landscape, and in the town as in the country.

It may well be that we cannot see from the window of our basement or from our attic above the roof the first fiery radiation from the mounting sun as he rolls up over the rim of the world.

But though a less startling apparition, there is a peculiar and quite special attraction in the golden light, all the richer and more mysterious for the mist that obscures it, as it falls upon some particular promontory of masonry; whether this be the coping of a wall, the spire of a church, or the dusky smoke-stack of a group of chimneys.

And though it is likely enough, as we watch from our iron bedstead in our city attic the wild raindrops stream down the window, we may sigh for the familiar roar of waves, or for the moaning of reeds, or for the hollow thunder of shaken pines, there is something — who can deny it? — hardly less stirring and strange about the naked motions of the wind as it shrieks through the cracks of the doors and round the stairway corners and away over the wilderness of roofs!

The goblinish gurglings and suckings and sobbings of the blackest town canal can carry the mind at night, as it follows them down the wharfs and estuaries of mystery, quite as far as when they go murmuring and whispering under the mossy stones of a country bridge.

As a worshipper of the primordial elements no banishment from pastoral beauty can estrange your soul from the vast motions of planetary chemistry which after all are the things that give the magic to the forest, the grandeur to the tossing branches, and its air-borne flight of desperate thoughts to the most trackless swamp and loneliest weir.

It must be recognized, too, that the moonlight upon a mountain rock can be felt in its stripped and bare sublimity not less but more by a mind that has trained itself to isolate both the moon as one mystery, and the dingiest masonry as another mystery, in the same incomprehensible procession of world-stuff out of which our whole terrestrial Dimension is made.

The advantage to old age, whether masculine or feminine, of the particular trend in Nature-Worship I am advocating will be realized when my reader considers the inevitable limitations which physical infirmity entails, the inability to face the weather, the difficulty of enduring extremes of cold and heat, not to mention that lack of nervous resilience, that decline in emotional energy, which accompany the slow ebb of the life-stream.

Age is of necessity, even though not hearth-bound or bedridden, a good deal confined in its out-of-door activities. Any system of Nature-enjoyment, therefore, which concentrates upon the universal and ever-recurring elements of the boundless Inanimate has an advantage over both the artistic and the scientific spheres of self-conscious culture.

Certainly under our temperate zone the further an old person can go in his worship of sun and moon in their alternations, of rains and clouds in their vagaries, of primordial or humanized matter in its multiple textures and tints, the richer and intenser will be his pleasure. I willingly admit that some rudimentary acquaintance with the more easily detected stars and planets and zodiacal signs is important to one whose perambulations are limited — limited perhaps to the same strip of pavement, or the same stretch of gravel!

Not only so, but through the windows of any attic, above the rails of any basement, where only a fragment of sky is visible, these divine accomplices of our destiny, these celestial watchers and ministers of our fate, can be brought, one or other of them, into the circle of our secretest thoughts. *These* are the natural, and eternal, confessors of our griefs, the sworn confidantes of our best and worst reactions. The old man or the old woman who has the heavenly bodies — some particular one out of all the rest it may be — to share their loneliness has a secret refuge that nothing but blindness can remove.

And if blindness itself comes upon us we still have the sound of the wind, which is the voice of Space itself, the parent of all, crying aloud its imperishable protest against the heartless and meaningless confusions of Time.

And if, to blindness, deafness be added, and if, to deafness, paralysis, we can still say with the much-enduring Odysseus: 'Put this, too, with the rest: for this also I can endure!' Yes, while any sort of 'machine', as Hamlet calls it, remains to us we can still feel, if it be only through the pores of our skin, the presence of the darkened, muted elements we have chosen as the companions of our endurance and the objects of our enjoyment.

The truth is that in our old age we return — in our second childhood if you will — to that Childhood of our Race, that Golden Age 'before the Fall', when the truth was felt, as it has never been felt since, that the life of Nature is pluralistic; and that the secret of things lies in the Many rather than in the One.

And there may even reach us sometimes from these great non-human Companions of the essential non-humanness of our inmost soul an ineffable sense that they also — they who also are so old! — are enduring, even as we are enduring, and are waiting, even as we are waiting. *the next transformation.*

Confused by the beat of the rushing wings of Time, we know not for *what* we, or they, are waiting; but 'Wait!' is the watchword passed between us; and uncommitted to Time and unsquared by Time — with these as our allies — *we wait.*

But I must offer my readers a more definite example of what I am driving at in all this. Permit me therefore to call upon you to imagine an old man or an old woman coming into their parlour or into their kitchen at breakfast time. Here, let us suppose, some younger hands have already lit the fire or the stove, and above the red coals the kettle is about to boil.

Let us suppose the time of the year to be late autumn, with only a pallid phantom-like sunshine flowing in through the window, outside of which we can through the mist only barely discern the wall or fence of the backyard with a couple of stone steps surmounted by a small iron gate.

In accordance with the particular training of the imaginative senses which I have been trying to elucidate our elderly friend contemplates the humming kettle and the red blaze; and a rich influx of far-drawn associations arise in his mind — are indeed deliberately called up by his mind — for both these inanimate objects possess for any intelligent 'abstractor of the quintessence', as Rabelais would put it, a rare symbolic virtue.

The black kettle, presumably of the commonest shape and made of iron, gathers about itself, between the pallid yellowish light from the window and the blood-red glow of the fire, a wavering aura of all the long centuries during which human skeletons, in plump or withered flesh, in fair or foul attire, have waited 'for the water to boil'.

No consecrated chalice lifted between the hands of a priest could convey more of the essential poetry of earthly life than that smoke-begrimed object on hearth or stove, made of that hard grey substance that was more precious than the 'pitiless bronze' of their sword-blades to the people in Homer.

And if our friend's will to enjoy the basic ritual of the earth forces his mind into activity over the black kettle, how much more will it do so over the fire itself?

'Ho! Ho!' cries the heart of age, in its diurnal rejuvenation under the magic of Prometheus: 'Ho! Ho! I am warm. I have seen the fire!'

Old age has been accused of being greedy over food. Let its middle-aged accusers look to themselves! *They* are greedy about far less excellent, far less natural, far less earthy, far less divine things than food. Not to be greedy over food when you're old is to be ungrateful to that bountiful wisdom of Nature which, when the lust of the eye and the pride of life begin to wane, stirs up the third pleasure-sense that binds us to existence; the sense that unites all the poor creatures of earth, and will unite them — *saecula saeculorum* — to the end of this Dimension in the most symbolic and religious act we can perform!

To young people who swallow their meals in haste and then fret till they are 'excused' so as to snatch a few moments longer in the garden or the street before darkness falls, and who look with positive hatred at the munching jaws of their toothless grand-dad, I would say: 'Off and enjoy yourself! But let the old man do the same.'

Yes, the next time you catch any of us retired performing dogs of Life's Circus lost to the world over our supper, mock us-not. 'Tis true that we old people *are* greedy over our food.

But we have a perfect right to be! This unsightly ritual, to you so grotesque and pitiable, is the oldest Mystery-Play in the world and the oldest Symbol in history. Those toothless gums on this very morning are busy with the quintessence of a thousand fields of shining grain!

It is Demeter herself who is stirring that cauldron; it is the Heavenly Plough that made the furrows to grow that bread! Have you ever noticed, reader, when your hearth or your stove has been replenished, and the yellow flame is flickering, how a miraculous reflection of those fiery tongues can be seen outside the window? Quit your chair for a moment and peer out. Against the grey stones, against the iron rails, above the rain-soaked leaves and the wet ground, there floats, like a mystic mirage of all the hearths of all the centuries, an enchanted blaze!

A vision of Fire in the Abstract it is, the Platonic Idea of Fire, the substantial, yet impalpable Reality of Fire, its celestial Essence, wherewith Scotus of Erigena might have confounded the Aristotelians, wherein Heraclitus would have beheld the Beginning and the End of the whole cosmos.

Well! As that reflection depends on the real fire and yet has an exist-

ence of its own, so with the pleasure the old man gets from lingering over his loaf and his teapot.

But let us imagine our old woman in her shawl and our old man with his stick, shuffling across the threshold, opening and shutting that little iron gate, and taking a brief stroll down the road or up the lane. True it is that they live in the country. True it is that the country they live in offers picturesque and artistic wonders innumerable. True it is that a learned botanist, an impassioned ornithologist, an obsessed student of geological formations, would find paradises of interest if they only could be conveyed by car, or bus, or even bicycle, into the wilder solitudes of this dedicated spot.

But our old people have neither the heart nor the strength for these undertakings. Are they therefore debarred until they die from the rarer, richer pleasures of Nature?

On the contrary! How well we know the disappointments, the puzzlements, the grievances, the humiliating mistakes, to which these artistic and scientific initiates are doomed, even when they *have* been lucky enough to reach these privileged shrines of rarities.

But our aged pair have no need to go so far. Without painting their humble domicile in any particularly rosy hue we may legitimately suppose that they have not to proceed far ere they come upon a muddy streamlet crossing a bare slaty stone, from which it descends, a couple of inches perhaps, into a slimy pool with a susurrations more like the sob of an idiot than the Piping of Pan. No painter but a supreme one, no poet but a great one, no naturalist or geologist, unless he had what Spengler calls the 'physiognomic eye' of Goethe, could make much use of this dull road, this slimy pool, this whimpering trickle of water.

But our ordinary old man or old woman prods the mud, the stone, the rivulet, the three-inch waterfall, with the ferule of a stick or umbrella, and either experiences, without effort, a marvellous thrill of pleasure, or obstinately remains there, poking about, till the *inward gesture of enjoyment*, which he had learnt to force himself to make, culminates — the successful result of years of discipline — in a sensation hardly less desirable.

But whether reaching him by a lucky accident, through the mediation of 'Tyche Sōteer', *Chance the Saviour*, or by means of a long practice in what might be called 'the Art of Elementalism', the fusion of our aged person's sensibility with these simple and unassuming embodiments of

earth and water is conducive to an exquisite satisfaction, very hard to put into words.

Well! Let us be bold enough to imagine our old friend — whether man or woman — advancing a little farther down the road or along the lane. A declivity or enclosed pasture now meets the eye, its easy slope broken, let us imagine, by a couple of holly-trees whose evergreen foliage, displaying itself between misty greenness and cloudy sky, has assumed that glossy and brilliant lustre which such bushes are wont to take on when all else is gloomy and grey.

And our aged person's mind is stirred at once by a vague ineffable memory of some remote time when a natural effect like this — such shimmering metallic gloss against so forlorn a background — uplifted him into a seventh heaven. By a concentration of his will he catches this heavenly essence ere it has time to dissolve, and he sails away upon it into the Timeless.

We may suppose — for our friend is only too likely to be too infirm for long walks — that, as he turns to make for home, he catches sight of the river, the historic river of that district, winding its way between the scattered homesteads.

It is likely enough that a younger man or a younger woman would at once think of lively excursions and gala-delights, some of them full of 'sunburnt mirth', others more solitary, enjoyed, it may be, in the season of the year by the light of the moon, of the kind that implies a furtive trespass on the preserves of Mr. Justice Shallow!

But old age has, as I have hinted, its own special advantage in such a case, and free from all fretful longings for sweethearts, or poaching, or boating, or sport, it can let its mind dwell on the river *as a river*, dwell on the ancient mystery of that tide's winding flow, so different from all other embodiments of the watery element, different from ponds, lakes and seas, different from mountain-torrents, different from springs and pools, magically obscure in its remote inland source and a symbol of half the metaphysics of the world in its final mingling with the far-off sea.

Shuffling slowly home, our old man and old woman will, if they are true 'elementalists', instinctively or deliberately force their sluggish souls to fuse themselves with everything upon which their eyes fall. They won't draw back in artistic pain at the sight of a flimsily-erected row of little new houses. They won't embrace a beautiful ploughed-field while



they dodge a smoking dung-hill, or an old deciduous wood while they turn from a cabbage-patch.

Nor will the grey weight of the low-hung sky, or the sweet reek of trillions upon trillions of decomposing leaves, or the rain-soaked substance of mud-coloured cart-ruts disturb or destroy their enjoyment.

Yes, they are taking advantage of their superannuation from work and play, from competition with their fellows from responsibility *for* their fellows. Old age has set them free. They have entered into the divine freemasonry of that vast cycle of terrestrial change which is the life-death and the death-life of the planet. They partake of the antiquity of the river below them and of the rocks above them.

They feel dimly what they feel these feel. They feel through the dark recoil of chemical dissolution, the imperishable beat of the cosmic pulse, the systole-diastole of new life out of old death.

R. . . home past the familiar landmarks, they greet each gnarled and twisted tree-root that stretches into the ditch at their side as if it were a secret signal from old age to old age. The chorus of the twilight-gathering rooks may not always have been heard in that same spot; but the faint glimpse they now snatch of some unknown star, rocking, half-drowned, like a buoy-light in an infinite harbour, demands of them no effort of naming or measuring or locating. As their fathers saw it they see it.

Older than the meadows, older than the river, is this recurrent token of the coming on of night; and the very darkness itself that begins to descend upon them is felt in their present mood as it has been felt by others like them from the first twilights of time; felt as an infinite escape, as they shuffle home, from the wounding separations of all beginnings, into the healing absorbings of all ends.

## OLD AGE AND CONSCIENCE

In the complicated and difficult business of trying to analyse the Conscience of Old Age we are once more confronted by the everlasting difference between the sexes. This difference is no superficial one. On the surface there is a conventional agreement between the two.

Listen to any argument between a man and a woman where the question at issue touches the ancient problem of Good and Evil, and you will recognize no difference at all in the moral axioms taken for granted, or the tacit assumptions lying behind the dispute.

The man is probably the calmer and quieter of the two. He is certainly the more pompous, the more ponderous, the more logical. He is also the more complacent.

But they both use the same traditional moral tags. They both appeal to the same general principles. All that an invisible eavesdropper would notice at first would be that the woman's hits were more effective and aimed more deftly at the obvious weak places in her adversary's armour; and that while his attacks upon her would be directed against women in general, hers would pierce him where, as an individual person, he is most vulnerable.

So much for the surface of the dispute; but it is our affair to look a little deeper, and the moment we do so the controversy grows more significant.

While the man, as we have already noted, is engaged in laying down the law with a superior air of magisterial or professional rationalism, appealing to custom, convention, tradition, authority, and while the woman anoints her barbs with personal wormwood and directs her aim against the man's dearest and most sensitive life-illusion, a yet subtler difference comes to light.

Save for a few oft-repeated animadversions upon women in general the man's arguments are all positive ones; but before long we shall note that this positivity in his method is countered in her case by the use of the negative pole of moral electricity.

By this I mean that while the man goes on obstinately repeating his

logical deductions loaded with professional prejudice and interspersed with reminders of his undeviating consistency, the woman enlivens her critical denunciations of his behaviour in the case at issue by a series of onslaughts carrying the matter back over many years, carrying it back to their original union, carrying it back to the way his parents brought him up, carrying it back to the way his parents were themselves brought up!

The positive elements in the particular case upon which, 'good easy man', he has been taking his stand, are now thrust aside as irrelevant; and in their place he finds himself on the defensive against an encyclopaedic array of the historic lapses of himself and his whole family in manners, breeding, politeness, and decency.

By means of these skilful attacks not only *ad hominem* but *ad gentem* all the magisterial pseudo-rational logic of a self-righteous man is neatly sidetracked; and he is driven from his base into a region of emotional grievance where he is as much out of his element as she is in hers.

An invisible observer of this typical battle will not, however, fail to mark that the *coup de grâce* which finally confounds him is delivered with a weapon drawn from his own armoury, a weapon which in some way or other in the heat of the struggle has passed out of *his* hand into *hers*; so that in his sulky bewilderment, instead of feeling with unruffled complacency that superior reason has been overcome by an access of emotionalism, he feels—and this is singularly disturbing to his life-illusion—that he has been false to his own principles.

But the sequel to all this is still more puzzling to the man, though at the same time it is an indescribable relief. He is indeed now privileged to be present at one of those mythological metamorphoses which revert to the prehistoric beginnings of human life upon earth.

Puzzled, bewildered, sulky, prepared to remain gloomy and, as Sir Thomas Urquhart would call it, 'metagrabolized' for the rest of the day, his self-respect gone, his complacency shattered, our aged Justiman is suddenly aware that his no less aged Theodora is advancing towards him with outstretched arms, her features dissolved in that smile of ineffable tenderness which plucked at the roots of his heart when he first declared his love half a century ago!

Their embrace of reconciliation awakens in him a feeling that he has known again and again at such moments—but alas! has never been able to recall clearly enough so as to reconcile it with his reason—the

feeling, namely, that he is not only understood to the depths of his soul, but is actually, though he cannot guess why, found to be most admirable at the very moment when his own esteem for himself has sunk to its lowest level!

So profoundly restorative is this feeling that he dare not attempt to analyse it, though it evokes in him a dim suspicion that life is interpenetrated by some psychic force which incalculably reduces the moral superiority of man over woman and even throws a disturbing grain of doubt upon the logical basis of the universe.

The unfortunate thing is that this extraordinary revelation disappears as quickly as it comes. It works its magic. The man's sulkiness is assuaged; and with the assuagement of his sense of injustice his normal self-esteem and self-respect return. But with his recovered complacency there also returns the whole weight of his traditional, rational and logical convictions. Once more he knows how entirely correct he has been in his attitude to the point at issue.

The Categorical Code is still the Categorical Code; and the gulf between Right and Wrong remains unbridged. What he cannot realize at such times, for his relief at being himself again is so intense that he instinctively refrains from exploring the bruises of his fall, is the fact that he is the *alter ego* in a life-long union of two creatures so absolutely different that neither their common human speech, nor their common human tradition, can restrict the issue, the moment it becomes a matter of conscience, to any common denominator.

As far as conscience goes, the difference between an old woman and a young woman is entirely negligible. They both possess — barring fantastic individual exceptions — the same modest and natural immorality and the same incorrigible rebelliousness against law and order.

What in the young woman has been an innocent and spontaneous instinct, in the old woman has become an experienced and caustic cynicism. At least to the old man it appears as cynicism. To the old woman herself it appears simply as one of those basic truths that men will always be at once too pedantic and too childish to accept.

When it becomes a question of sexual error the male tradition always assumes that a young woman's virtue has to be protected by a combination of ignorance and force. Masculine literature is permeated with the notion that old women, if not actually in league with the devil, are always

ready with their drugs and spells and incantations to lure young women to their destruction.

But great creative Nature has her own purpose in all this, a purpose more concerned with the production and protection of children than with the purity of the mother or the piety of the father.

It is Nature, or at least the nature of this our Present Dimension, that has brought it about that a woman's attitude to life is determined not by her moral convictions but by the emotions of love and hate; and even sometimes by a feverish and scalding nuxture of both these passions. It is never the woman, it is always the man who is so often heard protesting: 'How can you say you love me, when you can do a thing like this?'

Every woman, of course, knows well that 'to love' belongs to a completely different category of psychological reality from 'kindness'; and yet this simple masculine expostulation comes as naturally from the lips of a selfish old dotard as from those of his bewildered grandson! It is a pitiful and indignant attempt to raise to the level of rational analysis this amazing indifference in his god-given companion to the claims of reason and justice.

What the most virtuous man finds as hard to learn as the youngest rake is that with women love is so much a part of their intrinsic being that momentary lapses from kindness or self-control mean — to *their* minds anyway — nothing at all.

What every woman wants most of all is for her man to be absolutely dependent upon her, drawing his life-force and life-purpose from her, as a tree draws its sap from the earth. That the man, too, *needs* this is certain; but what he *wants* is a very different thing. He wants to be praised. He wants to be honoured. He wants to be humoured. He wants to be indulged in his comforts, desires, tastes, hobbies, and prejudices.

In his view 'love' implies unbounded admiration, together with repeated, particular, and well-timed acts of consideration, not to mention plenary indulgence to all a person's faults! To her 'love' is simply the secret of life; and that any transitory spasm of rebelliousness or mischief or even fury should be regarded as throwing doubt on the authenticity of 'love' is inconceivable.

Now in spite of the abysmal gulf between the sexes — never to be filled up save by the molten ashes of the final catastrophe — there is no doubt that one of the greatest advantages which a well-mated couple gain by growing

old together lies in the fact that each of them is forced to acquire the supremely difficult technique of living cheek by jowl not only with their *predestined opposite* but with a creature who lives in a different element!

It is as though it could be miraculously arranged that a fish could carry with it its crystalline stream into the thin air while it cohabited with a bird.

Such a partnership can be the most stimulating and the most thrilling condition possible to flesh and blood. It can also be the most tragic. And my point here is that the former happy consummation cannot be reached till the passionate attraction between the sexes to each other has been totally superseded by *something else*. And this 'something else' is a *Mysterium Tremendum*, a most curious mystery.

We all remember what the Bible declares about a man and a woman becoming 'one flesh'. Well, what I would presume to suggest in this connection, since in old age our fleshly desire dries up, or at least 'thaws and resolves itself into a dew', is that the aged couple in question 'become one bone'.

To reach this consummation, whereby, to glance once more at the Book of Genesis, our aged Adam may be said to regain his lost rib, it is necessary for the woman to sublimate a little her already sub-tidal love-hate, and for the man, like a weather-beaten mariner, to take his tossings for granted.

No devotee of Rabelais, that 'greatest intellect of modern times', as Balzac so quaintly calls him, will have forgotten the Golden brooch in the youthful Gargantua's cap, representing the union of the sexes.

And to apply this 'Novum Organum' to the complicated problem of Old Age's attitude to Good and Evil, it becomes clear that what our troubled human conscience needs is a certain mingling of the 'alkali' of feminine instinct with the 'acid' of masculine reason. These diversely galvanized plummets, used side by side, reveal the nature of life's treacherous currents more prosperously than can either of them when used alone.

And this is the cause why the oracles upon Right and Wrong of old Bachelors and old Spinsters are less to be trusted than the judgments of those who wear, as the good Grangousier saw to it that his burly son did, 'a fair piece enamelled, wherein was portrayed a man's body with two heads . . . and about it written in Ionic letters: *Vir et Mulier propissime homo*: "A man and woman together make the truest Man".'

Indeed as Rabelais says in his conclusion to his second book: 'Never

trust those that always peep out at one hole.' But what of the relations of old people to the new generation? Certainly the cataclysmic epoch of world-history, during which these lucubrations, as our ancestors would say, are being penned, offers a startling balance-sheet of the debit and credit accounts of youth and age in their contribution to human destiny. As in the case of feminine instinct and masculine logic it would seem as though the secret purposes of Evolution can only be fulfilled by striking a balance.

In the first place does it not look as if most of the unpleasant aspects of Nazism and Fascism and even some of the less appealing aspects of Communism were due to the ignorance, the violence, and the suppressed eroticism of youth? And does it not appear too that the weakest and most fatal characteristics of British Bureaucracy were due to the stiff-necked obstinacy of old age?

Thus between inspired violence and uninspired caution, between the fanaticism of youth 'peeping out at one hole' and the complacency of age 'peeping out at one hole', the pendulum of the greatest struggle in history swings.

And alas! the misunderstandings between youth and age are by no means confined to the war. We all know the bitter nature of this hostility even in the most peaceful times. The charge of 'selfishness' is hurled like a shuttlecock from one to the other. 'The selfishness of youth' — 'the selfishness of old age' — how sick we grow of this conventional abuse!

Aye! we must burrow deeper; burrow into the inner substance of these two much-abused 'selfishnesses'. And a blessed moment it will be when the more intelligent among our moralists cease altogether from repeating this parrot-talk about 'selfishness'.

What else, in the name of common-sense, can a 'self' be but 'self-ish'? We are all the same; all tarred with this most universal of brushes!

Or, to put it more genially, we are all guests and cronies, *hospes comesque*, at the Sign of the ancient Egyptian tavern of the Flesh-Pot. It almost seems sometimes, when you hear a person of a kindly temperament, who happens to be born under a lucky star, abused as 'selfish', as if the doctrine of 'self-sacrifice' were nothing but a crafty conspiracy on the part of the unlucky to poison with a drop of conscientious gall the very well-spring of human happiness.

The truth is that any sound discrimination between Good and Evil

must be based on the abysmal right of every 'self' to be 'self-ish', of every 'ego' to be an 'ego-ist'

It is only from the basis of this primordial axiom of common sense that a true perspective with regard to Good and Evil can be reached. Once this is granted, there will be an increase, not a lessening, of our awe and wonder, when people, *craving a deep urge from within*, put another's welfare above their own and it may be give up their life for what they hold dearer than life.

It certainly is a monstrous thing *to take for granted*, as we used to be tempted to do in time of war, that the lives of *young men* are the pre-ordained and proper sacrifice to the cause of righteousness. Socrates took the opposite view when he implied that an old man's life, since according to Nature it was nearer its end, was a more natural, if less heroic, offering to the gods.

But it is hard to avoid the conclusion that in its passion for the dramatic and spectacular the human race itself is responsible for throwing a radiance of glory about reverberating acts of startling heroism, while it disparages what are sometimes called the 'humdrum virtues'.

And yet, it seems to me, that in the eyes of the gods the real abysmal difference between the mystery of Good and the mystery of Evil as these things are manifested in our present Dimension is a difference that lends itself to a much more significant analysis in the realm of the Commonplace than in the realm of the Spectacular.

Do not the very syllables 'hum-drum' fall on the ear with a kindlier terraqueous murmur of wind and water than the volcanic reverberations of such expressions as 'saga', 'epic', 'catastrophic', and the like? To any student of our race's supreme wisdom, the wisdom to be found in Homer and Rabelais and Shakespeare and Cervantes, it will be revealed that the difference between Good and Evil in the realm of the 'humdrum' is even wider than in the realm of the tremendous and the colossal.

It is in the simple traditions and daily habits of the ordinary 'common-or-garden' man and woman that the abiding and immortal poetry of existence is to be found; and who can deny that the subtlest difference between Good and Evil is an essential portion of this poetry of ordinary human life?

Thus it becomes evident just where the peculiar advantage of old age over youth and middle-age is to be found. It is to be found in the fact that



while the romanticism of youth hurls itself into spectacular heroism and dramatic adventures, and while the worldly competence and practical efficiency of middle-age harden and stiffen under the burden of material responsibility, old age, as it falls back in its weakness and infirmity upon the elemental pleasure of being alive, finds leisure enough to ponder on this whole mystery of Good and Evil; finds leisure enough to listen to those low-voiced undertones of the tide 'that brought us hither', which are so to speak whispered backwards from the sea-washed wind-rows of the remote past into the muddy reed-beds of the familiar present.

In all the resounding and resplendent deeds into which the thirst for violent action plunges the energy of youth, and into which its burden of practical responsibility drives the massive character of middle-age, the finer distinction between Good and Evil, yes! and the whole metaphysical problem of the nature and origin of Good and Evil, tend to be obscured.

To reach a balanced perspective upon these matters there is needed not only a certain nearness to the elements resembling that which old sailors and old farm-labourers attain, and such as one day, under less desperate conditions, old armen may be trusted to win, but a certain — how shall I say it? — *deliberately cultivated porousness* to these primordial presences.

Why is it, in the war now going on, there is so much more chivalry between the combatants, and so much less savage hatred, in sea-fights and air-fights, than in battles upon the land? And why is it that among all the various theatres of war the particular struggle taking place, even as I write these words, in the desert sands of Libya and Egypt should be the one of all others the most chivalrous?

Is it not because of a natural response, in ourselves and in our enemies alike, to those prehistoric 'Near-East' sands which were, as my brother Llewelyn would say, 'the Cradle of God'; and which are still, after the air and the sea, the least humanized and the most primordial of all forms of the Inanimate?

In order to sink down into the depths of our soul, in order to analyse with our least obstructed, least cluttered, least sophisticated intelligence, the inmost secret of Good and Evil, a drastic detachment is necessary, a detachment from all the pseudo-scientific verbiage which spawns and spreads in our crowded Centres of Civilization.

Not for a moment would I suggest that this desirable detachment from the world, this fusion with the elemental background is impossible of attain-

ment in a great city. But such a thing in such a place requires an austerer concentration of mind, and a more constant and more conscious exercise of will than is required in the country.

It is an inkling of this psychological truth that accounts for the solitary ways of hermits, recluses, and 'holy men', all down the ages; but, as Goethe says, while such as these are able to drink at the fountain-source of wisdom, it needs a living contact — however disturbing to our egoism such a contact may be — with other human bodies and souls, to develop our *character*.

For the growth of intellect, for the deepening of whatever originality the gods may have bestowed on us solitude is desirable if not essential; but when it comes to putting our ideas into practice it is another matter.

That Saints and Seers are the devil to live with is well known and many of us have learnt by bitter experience that philosophers are more difficult still.

And what does this mean? Well! simply that the most subtle knowledge of Good and Evil is powerless in itself *to make us good*, unless in the mêlée of life we have been, like pebbles on the shore, subjected to the ebb and flow of human affairs.

The greatest of all mortal virtues and the one most conducive to a happy life is clearly the most difficult of all to acquire in solitude. I am speaking of the virtue of humility. One might suppose that a free and fortunate loneliness in the presence of Nature, where the feeble human frame is confronted by the illimitable elements and isolated from social responsibility, would conduce to humility. On the contrary it conduces to excessive and extravagant pride! Pride of birth, pride of riches, pride of intellect — none of these can rival in arrogance or supercilious impertinence what is called *spiritual pride*.

This practical indictment of our famous human Sages is justified by the most simple experience. Who are the persons who make life tolerable, who make our sufferings and humiliations bearable, who increase the comfort and lessen the discomfort of everybody with whom it is their destiny to live?

Are they the sort of persons sometimes described as spiritually minded? Not a bit of it! They are the people whose life is actuated by instinctive goodness, combined with a humorous and tolerant tact.

And what lies behind this goodness, what lies behind this tolerant

wisdom: Always the same thing—an indescribable humility! Most of us, I think, would agree that the most precious offspring of the human race, the soundest, sweetest, wholesomest produce of evolution, is not the 'Great Man' as we so preposterously name him. Too well we know these accursed 'great men'.

Half the miseries and tragedies and horrors of history are their work. Nor is this blessed benefactor of us all the lonely Prophet, the awe-inspiring Saint, the tremendous Artist! The soundest product of all this evolutionary struggle, and the best promise for the future, is simply the common-or-garden *good man* of intelligence, tolerance, and reliability.

Your sharp-witted clever rogue loves to deride the rank and file of honest men as if they were all dolts, dubs, and dizzards. Dear God, they're not as simple as all that! Indeed to be a 'good man' or a 'good woman' in the true meaning of the word, a very considerable amount of intelligence and no small independence of mind is required.

The longer we live in this Present Dimension the thicker our experience of good and bad piles up and the greater the number of contradictions and paradoxes grows. And the living atmosphere of this experience—for wisdom doesn't consist of opinions and conclusions, but of a particular mingling of psychic and sensuous ingredients—can only be preserved in the rarefied air of humility.

Jonathan Swift, the most formidable and terrifying of all our English writers, declared once, I understand, that there is no such thing as 'a good old man'. I take it that the implication of this is that merely to have kept, as most of us have, in the foreground of our mind for the best part of a century what, as the hypocritical phrase runs, 'we owe to ourselves' is sufficient proof that we're rogues.

You have indeed only to look at the shrewd, handsome, well-preserved countenances of most of our *famous* old men to realize that Swift had some justification for his outburst.

But, as I have presumed to suggest, the soundest product of moral evolution must not be looked for in *any* 'great men', whether old, middle-aged, or young, but in the common-or-garden *ordinary man*, possessed, as I swear is the case with the majority of common folk, of a wholesome mixture of humour and kindness and independent judgment.

And the point I want to make here is that where the problem of Good

and Evil is concerned your ordinary old man has acquired purely and simply by the impact of the years, a basic attitude from which it is possible to draw more satisfactory conclusions than from the logic of the most tremendous prophets.

And what is the gist of this conclusion? Well! that in the long run the Good is bound to prevail over the Evil simply because of the Necessity of its own nature. For what is 'the Good' when we analyse it down to its last unresolved atom? It is *not* — as religious Dictators and certain Mystic Leaders would have us believe — the 'Law of the Universe' or the 'Will of the Creator'.

Nor is it the Behaviour of the Elect predestined to receive their reward in Eternity. It is simply the Dominant Urge among many others in this Present Dimension; upon the issue of whose life-and-death struggle with its most powerful Alternative Urge in the same Dimension the existence of all life's creatures depends.

The Good from the very start has been compelled by the inherent necessity of the situation — not only *has* been, but *is*, and for ever *will* be compelled — to do the very thing that Puritan Moralists have always condemned, that is to say to make use of Evil, and make use of it to 'feather the nests' of as many creatures possessed of life as the Dominant Urge can reach.

But not only has Good to use Evil for its divine ends; it has deliberately to accept the modicum of evil which it is bound to find in itself. As Croce says, '*Imperfect virtue*' is the only real virtue. Were virtue to become Absolute there would be no more virtue.

Thus when some young fanatic of this dangerous Absolute, which is as deadly to life as evil itself, protests to me: '*Doesn't this thin edge of the wedge of yours justify all wickedness, all cruelty, all oppression; and aren't you using, as Milton says, "the Tyrant's devilish plan, necessity"?*' — my answer is summed up in one single word, the word *Discrimination*.

I am not one for condoning abominable cruelty. No crime rouses my indignation more than the cruelty inflicted on animals in Vivisection. But in this matter of the use of Evil by Good the whole problem — as in all the crucial questions of human life — is a problem of *Discrimination*. It depends on the *kind* of evil, on the *amount* of evil, and on the particular effect of any *particular* evil.

It were nonsense to say that there is no cruelty connected with

slaughtering animals for food; and there are many people, of sensitive and imaginative nerves, who become vegetarians for this reason.

It seems to me, however, that the human conscience which is unable to see the difference between killing for food and torturing for scientific knowledge — for we all know that the humanitarian defence of Vivisection is fatally mixed up with casuistry and hypocrisy — is a conscience blinkered by what might be called a moral blind-spot.

To be killed for food is one thing, to be tortured to death for knowledge is quite another thing; and the gulf between these two sinks as deep as life.

And there is the same need for Discrimination when we come to the morality of war. There is nothing wrong about being a soldier or sailor or an airman during a war or in being engaged in any lawful belligerent operation. Where to a discriminating mind the evil enters is where the individual who *could be cruel or not*, and to whom the decision whether to be so or not has been left to him by the normal authorities, prefers to be cruel rather than chivalrous or merciful.

And again in the universal problem of sex-pleasure. To a discriminating conscience, and one possessed of the inestimable gift of common sense, there is nothing evil in the delight of sex *in itself*, whether normal or abnormal. Where evil comes in is where cruelty comes in; and it is obvious to a discriminating intelligence that such cruelty is not confined to definite acts of physical and mental sadism, but covers a much wider field.

So wide a field does the instinctive attitude of an honourable and scrupulous conscience cover, that no relaxing of legal or social or any other kind of *outward restraint* can prevent it being difficult for such a nature to cause acute and lasting pain to a mate or companion merely for the sake of a passing sensual delight, however justifiable such delight may be on other grounds.

When a deep all-absorbing love drives us into infidelity to our mate there of necessity arises one of those tragic emotional — and more than 'emotional', for our whole being is affected — crises in human life, which no moral-emancipation and no sex-equality and no relaxing of social usage can alter. We have arrived at one of the basic tragedies of mortal existence; and there is bound to be pain and remorse whichever way the decision goes.

## OLD AGE AND CONSCIENCE

It is here, in this matter of sex-infidelity, that old age has its tremendous advantage over middle-age. Was it from Sophocles to Pericles, or from Pericles to Sophocles, that that significant word was passed when the two elderly sages encountered a ravishingly desirable youthful figure on one of their walks? The word, anyway, was the extreme opposite of a sigh of regret!

It was a heartfelt exclamation of relief, that Nature herself does at last liberate us from the most deadly of all torments to the human conscience.

## OLD AGE AND GOOD AND EVIL

FAR closer to the quick of old age's conscience and far more fatal to its integrity than matters of the flesh or of the devil is as a rule anything that touches what old grave-digger Truggins in my brother Theodore's story calls, after his Dorset manner, 'me money'. Without being actually misers, most old men, and I fancy many old women too, find it absurdly difficult to loosen their purse-strings!

They have of course the tremendous excuse — an excuse completely lacking to youth and middle-age — of being unable, unless which, Heaven forbid, they are crafty usurers, to 'make', as we say, 'any more'.

In addition to this, their growing dependence on all their little physical comforts, especially on those connected with warmth and food, makes them shiver and hug themselves at the thought of penury or pauperism.

And, after all, it must be remembered that they have seen in their time not a few melancholy examples of the domestic misery caused by irresponsible extravagance.

The most unpardonable and unpleasant fault in an old man, next to callous and insensitive tyranny, is not miserliness but *conceit*. By 'conceit' I don't mean egotistical garrulousness. This, though tiresome and wearisome, is often a pathetic rather than a revolting trait. Nor do I mean vanity, which *can* be not only pathetic but actually endearing.

A really conceited old man, however, is a monstrous anomaly and a most repulsive apparition. It is like seeing an animal, a pig or a monkey, dressed up in human clothes. But to every species of hoarding, accumulating, saving, collecting, treasuring, we ought, I feel, however teasing and tantalizing such peculiarities are to us in our youth, to be the reverse of niggardly; to be in fact extravagant in our indulgence.

Where else can the immense urge which animates us all to stamp our image and superscription — the profile, so to say, of the current coin of our ego — upon our material surroundings, find its expression in old age if not in *some* form of hoarding? There are indeed few better examples of how much 'the Good' owes to 'the Evil' and how much, if we are to keep

the balance of our sanity, we must use 'the Evil', than this special vice of old age.

Grandfather knows — you may bet your life — from a thousand episodes in his early days, how not only the brave gallantries and reckless prodigalities of youth but the anxiety of middle-age to stand high in the world's favour, mean the robbing of the weak, exploitation of the simple, impoverishing of the helpless, not to speak of inflicting cruel privation and miserable money-panic on a man's immediate dependants.

I once heard Theodore Dreiser who, apart from Thomas Hardy, has been the most arresting human being I have ever met, express his wonder and amazement that, considering the natural selfishness of all mankind, what we call conscience should ever have appeared at all.

Yes, by God! the mystery is not the 'problem of evil'. The mystery is the 'problem of good'. To an ordinary person who has ceased to take *everything* for granted it seems an absolute miracle that there should be such a thing as 'a good man'.

How on earth did this miraculous conscience, powerful enough to pluck, to pillory, to purge, to prune, to imprison the unruly and obstreperous demon that dwells in all of us, ever arrive on the scene? Granting the truth of all I have argued in regard to the manner in which the Good *uses the Evil* to carry out its designs, the question still remains, how did the Good arise at all, how did it get lodged to such a terrific tune in the human consciousness? Or, to put it a little differently, how did man become, as the Book of Genesis says, 'like the gods', knowing Good and Evil?

The Platonic tradition, closely followed by Plotinus and Porphyry and Jamblichus and Proclus, makes the Good synonymous with the one universal God who is the supreme and ultimate Reality; and many sages, both heathen and christian, have taken this line, denying to Evil any positive existence at all!

Such, as we all know, is the line taken by Christian Science, if not by the Oxford Group. Such, however, is *not* the line taken by St. Paul nor by his Russian disciple, Dostoevsky. Nor is it the attitude of Homer or Shakespeare or Rabelais or Cervantes.

Among the ancient Religions of the East, the Persian mythology, in its rigid dualism, kept the two opposed Forces even more distinct than did St. Paul. To the soldierly initiates of the Sun-God, Mithras, life



presented itself as a clear-cut battle between the good and the evil spirits

The general tendency of modern scientific thinkers, in so far as they deal with this question at all, is to concentrate attention upon the deep instinct in Nature herself, displayed by animal and fish and birds and insects, and even to be traced in the vegetable world, *to protect the young*; and, following upon this, our attention is called to all those tribal rules and regulations, under the authority of priests and medicine-men, which tended to strengthen the tribe in its struggle for survival.

There is, however, no reason to assume that these opposite explanations of the existence within us of this troublesome *hospes comesque corporis*, this disturbing 'guest and comrade of the body', cannot be reconciled; for even if the struggle between Good and Evil is a cosmic or super-cosmic affair, as the Persians assumed and as St. Paul believed, there is no reason why it should have been particularized in the long-consecrated habits of historic custom if there were not something in Nature Herself that lends itself to this tremendous issue.

It begins in fact to dawn on us as we explore the poetry and the fiction and the chronicles of our race's remote past, that the human conscience in each of us is an organic sextant, a living compass, influenced by a great variety of interesting forces, and drawing its magnetic power from obscure and often completely unknown sources.

Religion, with its vast array of Deities, polytheistic, monotheistic, pantheistic, is only one of these streams of magnetic force. Nature's own tremendous urge towards the procreation, cherishing, fostering, teaching of the young is another; the life-and-death struggle between different races yet another; and while in the individual's actual personal experience, what might be called the common sense of necessity must also be included, the choice between good and evil at any particular moment is little affected by questions of the thing's origin.

One emotion, it would seem, is common to all manifestations of the 'conscience' within us. This is like the focus-point of an universal deposit from an infinite past, and it has come to play the rôle of a magnetic needle pointing North, a needle by which we direct our course. *I refer to the emotion of fear.*

And we all suffer from this. We may be as scientifically minded as you will. We may have ruled out the menace of the Supernatural by means of biology, anthropology, and the most daring psychology.

But we cannot get rid of fear. None of us can construct a non-conducting circle round this formidable microphone from the psychic ether; and as long as conscience functions — which is as long as we're not overpowered by pain or sickness — fear will be present with us

We can habituate ourselves to think of the visible and tangible world as the only world there is; but we cannot materialize our own mind. We cannot reduce to physical determination and chemical necessity the insubstantial thoughts by which we live, the thoughts which make up our living and abiding self.

I implore my reader to indulge in a moment's introspection, wherever he may find himself as he reads this sentence. Those solid objects around him — the shape of the room, the platform of the station, the trees of the garden, the pebbles at his feet — why! in a second they can be reduced to impalpable vapour, to less than vapour, by the intenser vividness, the more intimate and absorbing power of the thoughts that race through his mind.

And almost all of them have conscience as their pivotal centre. And what is the locale, the stage-set, so to speak, of these thoughts as they follow one another and melt into one another?

Ah! there lies the whole point. The circumambient etheric location of these thoughts, *which are himself*, which are essence within, beneath, above, beyond his corporeal frame, is a dark, limitless, inward extension, without boundary or end, an inward extension which is fearfully and tragically *exposed*.

And it is because of this dark, obscure, and inwardly recessive Boundless which surrounds the thinking self that our conscience is aware of the presence of fear. From the heart of this inwardly-receding darkness, this hollowness empty of all material substance, it is so fatally easy for our poor shivering identity, or frail 'animula, vagula, blandula', to summon up the peering inescapable presence of a supernatural Watcher — call Him, call It, by what name you will — who is aware of the quivering of our conscience-needle as it vibrates and oscillates between the North and the South of some tragic and unavoidable choice.

'Pure imagination!' you will cry. And I suspect you are right. But as long as our essential consciousness is exposed to this dark, inward Boundless so long will it be hard to feel certain that in this darkness we are absolutely alone.

## THE ART OF GROWING OLD

There is something terrible in the loneliness of every human mind; yes! and in the loneliness of the minds of the 'lower animals'. Which of us hasn't at some time or other been put to shame by the proud aloofness of these 'lower animals' when they are sick unto death?

But if our loneliness is terrible, more terrible still is the *opening* which this lonely exposure of our thinking self gives to the presence of Fear, of Fear in the Abstract, of the Platonic and super-dimensional Idea of Fear.

It is of course upon this dark void, which surrounds *on its inward side* the thinking identity of each of us that what we call 'Superstition' plays; and upon which, from time immemorial, every priesthood has played. And though the religious sense in us has many aspects less formidable and much more pleasing than this, it is as the Voice of Conscience out of the Dark, that its presence in our consciousness has been most effective and most fatal.

No wonder that Religion, especially when stripped, as every Puritan tends to strip it, of all intermediary and intercessory lightning-conductors, has often plunged certain morbid consciences, as it did the poet Cowper's, into sheer insanity.

And if priests and medicine-men have from the beginning been guilty of encouraging and trading upon this fatal sensitivity we must be fair to them by noting that in their rôle of intercessors and intermediaries between the terrible Watcher in the Darkness and our frightened conscience they have with their hummings and drummings frequently drowned the voice of 'That which must be Obeyed'.

Our real protection, however, the comfort and refuge of all persecuted individual consciences, is great creative Nature. Here, in the natural process of moral evolution — the only kind of evolution that is absolutely essential and without which the advance of science does more harm than good — there is real and effective help.

For our conscience itself develops! Here and nowhere else lies the true hope for our earthquake-shaken world. And the majestic irony of the situation lies in the fact that the very organism upon whose solitude-in-the-dark priests and messiahs and medicine-men have for so long played is now *itself* the one grand engine of retort that has the power to blow them all sky-high!

I don't of course mean this literally, for the persecution of Religion always springs from another Religion. A bigoted Rationalist, a fanatical

Scientist, is by temperament a persecutor. What he sees in Religion is always a Rival Religion, and the instinct of the common-or-garden ordinary man cries out like Mercutio: 'a plague on both your Houses!'

But our only hope for a happier world—that is to say 'a world made safe' for the fancies, humours, caprices, pleasures, frivolities, hobbies, theories, criticisms, rebellions, sensualities, heresies, schisms, detachments, indifference, apathies, antipathies, timidities and crochets, of the individual person—lies in the natural evolution of our human conscience.

Many of us have only to get it automatically lodged in that dynamo of self-accusation we call our conscience that no conceivable Watcher-in-the-Darkness can be less tolerant, less indulgent, less considerate, less *sensible* than what this naturally-evolved ordinary human instinct has now become, and lo! both the torment of self-laceration into which youth falls and the 'cat-ice' of worldly timidity over which middle-age slides cease to beset our path.

A certain massive sublimated common sense is what the strong among us acquire then, while a certain humorous self-mockery is the mood in which the weaker among us are able to keep both God and the Devil in their place.

But even *after* philosophical purgation of the verdict of 'the Dweller in Darkness' there still remains, if we know anything of the depths of our self-consciousness, all manner of ghosts, both holy and unholy, to be laid.

The shocks of outward Chance and Fate are so manifold that even when we've safely 'liquidated' the terrifying Onlooker our Victorian ancestors used to call 'the Everlasting Eye', the power of Fear upon our inmost motives still calls for unceasing scrutiny.

For one thing we are constantly aware of a vague belief *that it is unlucky to enjoy ourselves*. We tend to feel that the great arbitrary goddess Fortuna, or Tyche, must be constantly propitiated, lest, observing complacency, she should decide to give us a rude awakening. So we feel it incumbent upon us to deliberately put a few drops of vinegar into our wine, so as to forestall disaster.

And can there be discovered, you will ask, any cure for this world-old superstition? Well! I daresay I am being unduly bold, but I confess it seems to me that there *are* a few conjuring-tricks of that ... - ... kind, the Common Sense of the ordinary man, which can work this miracle.

The fear that ill-luck follows hard upon any especial self-reliance, as to our fortunate temperament, or our fortunate situation, or our fortunate domestic background, or our fortunate parentage, or our fortunate stars, is a fear as old as the human race, and in my view it is a superstition that can best be countered by a philosophy of life which regards the whole purpose of this Dimension of the Multiverse as the *fullest possible enjoyment of life in general by each individual life in particular*.

Such a view of things, which certainly is more in harmony with Nature than any other, implies as its practical issue nothing less than this; that a state of mental enjoyment by the use of the senses is the *legitimate moral aim* of every consciousness and that a state of misery and despair is its 'other', its antipodes, its opposite, its supreme Devil. I say a state of *mental enjoyment through the senses* because, while the senses are the medium for our most indestructible and permanent satisfaction, they are so subject to pain and discomfort and distress and disgust and weariness and satiety that they are even more helplessly at the mercy of outward events than are the pleasures of action or the pleasures of the mind divorced from sensuous enjoyment. The expression 'mental enjoyment through the senses' must, however, be taken in a wide sense. It must be understood, for instance, to include the mind's power of calling up those indescribable memories of sense-impressions upon which the deepest and most thrilling moments of our life depend.

The phrase must also be understood to include those delicious reveries and imaginative responses that come to us from looking at certain old-fashioned landscapes in oils — not necessarily masterpieces — or in studying the sort of book that compels us to go slow. In spite of all our efforts, however, it cannot be denied that old age does wither up many of our more lovely and ecstatic responses to this visible and audible world. The sex-urge is behind so many of these raptures and this sometimes ebbs completely after three-score and ten.

Blindness, too, and deafness and every sort of paralysis may remove medium after medium of our contact with Nature. But if the ultimate imperative of our conscience remains the same — namely the imperative summed up in the phrase, *Enjoy all: be kind to all* — we shall soon find that the whole problem of Good and Evil, as far as our individual life is concerned, is narrowed down to a satisfactory simplicity of effort.

In considering this whole question of the human Conscience, and

especially of the Conscience of old age, in relation to the immemorial difference between Good and Evil, and in attempting to establish some working criterion of our own against so much that has become traditional, our present championship of the *moral duty of sensuous enjoyment* finds itself opposed and confronted by an ascetic imperative almost as old as our race itself. I refer to the doctrine taught by spiritual and mystic sages, including the Christian Saints as well as the Stoics of the Classic Era; that the wise man, or 'the superior man' as the Chinese authorities put it, should be as indifferent to the pleasure of the senses as he is indifferent to their pain.

We live to-day in the presence of a world-wide revolt against this doctrine, and it is noticeable that this revolt—led not by 'bad' men but by very 'good' men—is primarily concerned with the sense-pleasures of sex.

Now it seems to me that the prominence given to the enjoyments of sex in this connection, accompanied by the prevalent idea that the sex-urge lies behind *all sensuous pleasure*, has been carried too far.

In my present attempt to become a sort of psychic *medium* for the essential peculiarities, both good and bad, of old age, I am compelled, since the sex-urge in old age runs in many cases somewhat weak and thin, to call attention to what some would call 'the second string' of a life devoted to sensation, namely the pleasure of eating and drinking.

Now let me hasten to say that by 'eating and drinking' I'm not referring to '*drink*' as it has come to be called, nor to any form of gluttony. I am confining my remarks to the most simple and ordinary pleasures of taste, as they satisfy the natural and legitimate claims of palate and belly.

Now it seems to me that in connection with this matter of the pleasure of eating and drinking—this great 'second string' of the life of sensation which I am defending—there is a serious 'gap' or 'lacuna' in the valuable but perilous investigations of psychoanalysis.

Here and now I commend most heartily and seriously to students of this dangerous and fascinating Pseudo-Science the advisability of directing their psychic-neurotic studies—we will assume that the abominable practice of vivisection has been suppressed—to the part played in human nature by our alimentary senses as distinct from our erotic ones.

If, as I am tempted to claim, there is a fresh vision of life, and a vision as near reality if not nearer than any other, to be won from the particular attitude which old age shares with infancy, and of which the phrase about

'second childhood' is intended to be a ghastly parody; why then this 'modest proposal' of mine is worthy of all acceptance; namely that the true substitute for the Life-Propagating Sacrament is the Life-Preserving one. Our food and drink, the great realistic necessity, is also the great poetic ritual that binds all our days 'each to each in natural piety'. And its 'idea', like the 'idea' of sex, underlies our response to many things.

Suppose you are spending your next free summer afternoon taking a leisurely walk through an ingratiating but quite unedumatic landscape. Do you think you can keep a close enough watch on yourself so as to make a series of mental notes on your sensations and ideas? If you can, you will, I know, discover that the pleasure you are deriving from your thoughts and from your feelings is of a very special, subtle, and singular kind: and is a pleasure much more akin to eating and drinking than to 'making love'.

Remember it is against the rules of the game to swear on your oath — purely for the satisfaction of refuting the present writer — that you have completely different feelings from any that he here seeks to depict.

Considerably different, of course, your feelings will be; but if you play fair I'm sure you'll experience the same general drift of the sensational tide.

And my primary argument is that what you will be at once aware of, and aware of far more intensely than of any particular colours or forms or sounds, will be what I might describe as *the smell of the day*. In the next place, and before you concentrate upon any particular objects, you will be vividly conscious of the *touch of the day*. By this I mean the warmth or the chill of the atmosphere, the exhalations of cold or heat from the actual soil under your feet, and, above all, the feel of the wind on your bare skin. But now in the third place we come to the crucial point of all: namely the *taste of the day*.

Now of course all three of these reciprocities play their part in any sensitive 'love-making'; but I do not see how I can be refuted when I say that there is much more of the intimate pleasure of eating and drinking in these three cravings than of the intimate pleasure of love-making.

And I am sure I am right when I contend that what every human being experiences — especially in old age — as the diffused cause of his most thrilling satisfaction, as he walks upon the earth, is the combined appeal of smell, touch, and taste, fused into what might conveniently, though perhaps not elegantly, be called *chewing the cud* of sensuous satisfaction.

And if you consider this psychic eating of Nature's body and drinking of her blood you must surely see that it is of necessity a more *continuous* process than any occasional 'ravishing' of the Great Mother however ecstatic such intermittent ravishings, or — if you are a feminine soul — such intermittent abandonments may be.

And it is of the nature of such sex-ecstasies not only to be intermittent but also to be attended by reactions of exhaustion and by fits of complete weariness. The most eloquent advocates of the delicious inebriation of these exciting raptures stress as our dominant human craving a longing to transcend ourselves by losing ourselves in the life of another, in the present instance in the life of the mother of us all. But my own conviction is that it is a more harmonious gesture and a gesture more within the power and scope of most of us ordinary people to devote our energy to the sacramental eating and drinking the body of the Great Mother than to lose our personal identity and drown our individual being in the self-transcending ecstasy of sexual union with her.

Furthermore, as I have hinted above, and as the very psychoanalysts themselves are bound to confirm, all the most natural, most constant, most normal, and most thrilling human enjoyment begins with our sucking the breasts of our mother and not with abortive attempts to make love to her.

The most difficult, hazardous, and treacherous piece of ground in my argument heaves in sight when it is incumbent upon me to defend as the ultimate imperative of our science — as in fact, the deepest essential good we know as contrasted with the deepest essential Evil — this verdict of my personal conscience that our primary duty and basic obligation, below and beyond all other virtue, is the duty of *forcing ourselves to enjoy ourselves*.

I implore my reader to note that I do *not* say 'to be happy', for both my study and my practice of the 'art of happiness' have led me to the conclusion that while we *can* force ourselves to enjoy ourselves we cannot force ourselves to be happy. Happiness comes and goes like inspiration.

I would humbly submit, however, that as a matter of experience the dark kingdom of unhappiness *has* often been invaded, and the gonfalon of life planted at the heart of its Slough of Despond, by obstinately repeated struggles to force ourselves to enjoy ourselves.

And what after all is the everlasting characteristic of the Good as against



the Evil? Surely it is that it tends to Life, whereas Evil tends to Death. And what is universally admitted to be the chief historic stimulus to the strengthening of any moral imperative within us? Surely that special essence of religious feeling which we think of when we speak of 'worshipping' some divine person or force or element or principle.

Well then! Are we not most of us — 'most of us' I say, for both Death and the Devil *have* their idolaters — worshippers of life?

And what is the most natural, most spontaneous, most obvious gesture of life-worship possible to man? *To force himself to enjoy himself!* All the really profound moral imperatives — apart from mere human custom — all the imperatives, I mean, which draw their vitality from something in Nature herself or even from something beyond Time and Space, are imperatives that can be obeyed *when we are absolutely alone* as well as when we are in the midst of our fellows. And the greatest act of life-worship we can perform is to force ourselves in the depths of our individual soul to enjoy life under the worst conditions while we remain alive.

I confess I find a peculiar satisfaction in using the simple expression 'enjoy ourselves'; for the truth is that the particular 'act of enjoyment' I have in mind, in spite of the smile that such naive philosophizing will call up on many lips, is the deepest mental, emotional, and dynamic gesture that our poor persecuted ego can possibly make.

As I have said, it is a gesture that can be made in solitude and can be made in a crowd. And furthermore it requires nothing to work upon save the basic condition of being alive on the earth.

When we summon up from the depths of our soul the electric or magnetic current of psychic force to give us strength not to yield to self-pity, or to gloom, or to boredom, or to worry, or to misery, or to cynicism, or to despair, we are in the condition in which Spinoza was when he reduced everything to the Absolute and the individual's relations with the Absolute.

But there is no need for us old men to follow the logic of Spinoza, or the logic of Hegel either, or indeed any logic at all. Goethe as an old man told Eckermann in so many words that we can learn from a study of Kant where the precise point arrives when rational logic fails us in a vicious circle; and where the wisest minds turn from the Absolute to Nature.

But just as Spinoza aimed at satisfying his emotional craving for something permanent to love by reducing everything to the Absolute, so we can find a permanent object for our sensuous enjoyment by reducing everything to the Inanimate Elements of this Present Dimension, under the *mental categories* of Time and Space and with quite as much return for our money as Spinoza ever got from God. Friends, lovers, possessions, youth, health, money, fame, honour, self-respect, comfort, security, all can be taken from us. What cannot be taken from us save by Death itself is the Boundless Inanimate about us.

Let me try to persuade you, reader, for it is the best possible sauce to any symposium among the young, to imagine yourself not only old and enfeebled, but blind and deaf and paralyzed and bedridden.

Still, through *some* chinks and crannies of sense-feeling, you are aware, with the help of memory, of the Boundless Inanimate in which we all live. You may have come to detest the sight of your nurse or your doctor, or even — for the nerves of the sick are touchy things — of your wife or child; but the sight of sky or earth or sun or moon or river will still be dear to you and upon these, through what sense-channels you have yet left to you, your mind can practise its ultimate gesture.

It must, however, be remembered that this outward-moving gesture, of forcing yourself to enjoy the Inanimate represents only *one side*, so to speak, of your living identity. There is also the other, *the inner side*. This 'inner side' faces that vast interior hollow Darkness, that mysterious and immaterial Void, receding God knows whither — for it is empty of all form, of all substance, of all matter — out of whose 'nothingness' our fatal tendency to religious superstition conjures up the terrifying presence of that ubiquitous 'Hound of Heaven', that imaginary 'Watcher', whose traditional moral judgments, often so monstrous and morbid, need constant amelioration by our own wiser, nobler, and subtler common sense.

Now while the deepest imperative of our conscience *looking outwards*, in spite of weakness and pain, in spite of discomfort and boredom, is to enjoy all, the same imperative, *looking inwards*, facing that interior Void and defying that imaginary Watcher, commands us to draw strength from this inward abyss to obey the second half of our dictum, namely, the imperative: 'Be kind to all.'

I fancy most of my readers will agree with me when I maintain that

the worst of the great Philosophical Systems as compared with the poetic wisdom of such ancient sages as Empedocles and Heraclitus, or such modern seers as Shakespeare, Rabelais or Montaigne, is that they fail to provide the sort of magical incantation and oracular clue-word that in its gnomic brevity can serve us as an exorcism when Apollyon has got us down.

What we need is something deeper than a *motto*, something profaner than a *prayer*, and yet something that can be repeated over and over till it rises automatically to our lips when we gather up our forces at a crisis.

Let my reader, however, once get my drift just here and he can easily reject as too pedantic or too priggish or even too definite my 'Enjoy all, be kind to all' and substitute some mental gesture of his own, which he may prefer to leave unarticulate.

But there is something else, and something very important from my point of view, that I want to insist upon here. Granting that our ultimate scoop of introspection — when we really sink down to rock-bottom, if you can speak of 'rock-bottom' in connection with a living entity — lays bare this double-sided state of our consciousness, on the outward side the vast material world, and on the inward side the empty void of thought, there remains, as a necessary conclusion, the fact that this double-sided self-knowledge has a further implication; the implication that what we call 'the astronomical universe' is not, and cannot be, *all there is*.

Mere *size*, carried to an infinite regression, whether telescopic or microscopic, can be safely discounted as a mathematical trick of the mind, what might be called a three-dimensional illusion. That the material Non-Self of atomic, chemical, or electrical forces seems infinite as to both time and space shows merely that at this point the mind has reached its terminus.

It is a sign-post marking 'the dead end', the 'cul-de-sac', of our present Dimension. It seems infinite because it is less than nothing; and the mere fact that all of us all our days are dogged by such a mirror-trick at the circumference of our consciousness is something that undermines all materialistic explanations at their very source.

Opposite to this atomic, or electronic, *false 'infinite'* which outwardly surrounds us there is also on '*the other side*' of our conscious self an entirely

empty darkness, wherein our thought returns upon itself in a complete void.

We are then it would seem — as Kant made sufficiently clear, before Hegel confused the situation with his acrobatic Absolute — confronted, as far as 'pure reason' is concerned, by an inescapable agnosticism.

With one side of our consciousness we embrace the substance of an astronomical world, a world which, whether in Space or in Time, or in any mingling of the two, we can neither think of as bounded or as boundless, while with the other side of our consciousness we are confronted by the void of our own thought contemplating itself in a closed circle.

Here, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter. Here is the bedrock *basis* and the rock-bottom *basis* of the problem of Good and Evil. From the flow of the life-tides that culminate in this maelstrom what finally emerges is the *circular swirl* of the Self within the Not-Self, always creating its own private multiverse of world-bubbles, each single one of which reflects its creator.

And from the above argument it will have become evident why it is that the best testing-ground for any really profound discrimination between good and evil is to be found in Old Age.

It is to be found there for the reason that the issue has been simplified to the limit by Old Age's immunity to the World and the Devil; both of these appearing to it — as in a planetary sense indeed they are — snares, side-issues, phantasies, monstrous cruelties, abnormal illusions, enemies of life, precursors and accomplices of death, and the only unequivocal forms of Evil.

And it is to be found there because after all its long years of shocks and disillusionments and strippings to the skin and outrages and humiliations, not only from its fellow-men but from the Unknown Powers who are the causes of Chance and Pain, Old Age has come at last to realize that Life Itself is the only supreme Good and that the ultimate virtue of the human soul is an unconquerable enjoyment of life and its ultimate sin a malicious disparagement of life.

## OLD AGE AND COMMON SENSE

It is just because Old Age is the natural embodiment and chief repository of humanity's *second thoughts* that the mental quality with which the piling up of the years especially endows it is that quality so rare in youth, and so perverted in middle-age, namely the quality of common sense.

Nor must it be forgotten that what common sense itself uses as its instrument for fathoming the depths, sounding the shallows, calculating the distance of the horizon, is humility.

When old people make use of this divine instrument it certainly isn't as if they ceased to be themselves and became mere recording camera-plates. They are still painters in oils. They are still devoted interpreters of nature through the medium of some particular system of *chiaroscuro*. They still react to the elements with individual temperaments.

But the pigments on their palettes are not muddled-up by manias; the textures of their canvasses are not stained or smeared by emotional outbursts nor the perspective of their vistas distorted by self-pity.

The mental mirror in which they see the world is sponged clear of all that blurs; and though its scope may be limited there is nothing exaggerated, nothing outrageously convex or concave, about the vision recorded.

May it not be that teachers of the young ought to analyse in more detail than they usually do the mental and emotional qualities of the special type of human genius that has been responsible for the particular works which on the infallible authority of the generations have been accepted as the world's literary masterpieces?

And may it not also be that if this were done we might be persuaded at an earlier epoch in our lives than is usual with us to seek to cultivate the qualities thus revealed? It is true we cannot acquire genius or inspiration by an act of will, but we *can* acquire what might be called the moral atmosphere or general mental climate of such writers as Homer, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Rabelais, Montaigne, Goethe, and Walt Whitman. Surely it must be allowed that different from one another as these inspired

writers are they are alike in the possession of *something* which they all share in common.

And this 'something' is a delicately adjusted common sense. The truth is we ordinary human beings are already possessed of an essential modicum of this precious quality. And what we possess — and this is the marvel of it — can throw a detached and humorous light both upon the side of our consciousness which embraces the outward elements of Space and Time and upon that other side of our consciousness which faces the dark void where thought turns back upon itself in its primal loneliness.

What this particular essence of humorous and genial common sense that we are compelled to recognize as the common denominator or universal secret linking Homer and Shakespeare and Rabelais and Montaigne and Cervantes really does for us is to save us from that dim ambiguous borderland, full of fancies and guesses and shadowy surmises, in which our restless soul — like Faust when he called up the Devil — is tempted to take refuge when we are confronted by the ultimate 'No Further!'

For the whole group of supreme intelligences I have just mentioned are, for all their imaginative genius and creative fantasy, essentially earth-bound and secular. The kind of poetical and stoical and humorous illumination that falls like diffused sunlight upon our habitual thought as we saturate ourselves with these classics has nothing to do with the dreams and visions and intuitions and psychic manifestations and occult revelations that we sum up in the word *mysticism*.

But at the same time we are left with a profound and wholesome conviction that the reality of life is by no means bounded by Time and Space.

We are left, it is true, in a mood of agnosticism, but with an unshakable conviction that the abounding and teeming potentialities of existence must be richer, thicker and more multifarious than the rounded-off Universe of Time and Space which is all we can embrace when we embrace the elements.

We are left with the unalterable conviction that this world of Time and Space, however thickened out by mystical and occult revelations, does not as we say, 'fill the bill'. And that it does not do so is no ecstatic hypothesis or sublime intuition.

It is a perfectly calm, steady, constant and practical axiom of our

ordinary intelligence. We cannot think, we cannot imagine, we cannot feel otherwise. Why, the very projectiles of religious faith that have themselves been one of humanity's ways of breaking out of this vicious circle of specialized logic, bear witness to the truth! Our time-and-space universe is only one Dimension in a vast congeries of unrealizable states of being.

Spinoza, as Nietzsche hints, must have derived a malicious anti-orthodox pleasure from identifying our space-time 'block-universe' so closely with the very substance of God that God Himself gets caught in the metaphysical circle of his own *necessitated Being*. This compelled the philosopher to posit other modes of the divine existence, such as are to be regarded as *completely outside those which our minds can grasp*.

But my point is that God Himself, the all-enfolding, all-embracing Reality of a Universe considered as One, can — he and his 'block-universe' together — be safely relegated to the realm of conjecture when in place of accepting as an axiom the extremely human deduction that since each of us is a 'One' the great 'God-Cosmos', of which each of us is a little 'Man-Cosmos', must also be a 'One' we boldly break the fetters of logic and posit a 'Many' as the wholesome alternative to this unwholesome unity!

That human logic does 'demand' such 'oneness' is doubtless mathematically and metaphysically true; but any ordinary experience of life throws extreme doubt upon the reality-revealing power of *logic* as *logic*, and indeed encourages us to treat its rational conclusions with caution and its academic exigencies with airy contempt.

Our agnostical doubts however, as to the finality of the logical notion of cosmic unity, does not necessarily pull up the dam to the flood of multifarious mysticism which is always waiting to flow over us with its swamping tide of ambiguity.

Old Age has often been accused of allowing the emotional mysticism of youth to dry up and wither. But the truth is that Old Age is wiser than both youth and middle-age in this essential matter.

It has learnt from experience the limitations of mysticism. It has learnt to return to those paradisiac days of early childhood when the magic and mystery of the Real and the wonder of the Here and the Now were enough in themselves.

Yes, old age can afford to discount dreams. *Dreams?* How weary we

grow of that fatal syllable with its eel-slitery drug-dosed sound, so 'staled and rung-upon' in the poetical affectations of youth!

Let Old Age boldly declare itself the sworn enemy of dreams; yes! and of the whole cloudy burden of mystical equivocations! Where is there any longer room for mysticism when the human consciousness, stripped to its naked and ultimate reality, and with the final stroke of death so near, embraces on its outward side the elements of Nature, and on its inner side turns austere upon itself, in the calm loneliness of its final integrity?

For the stark and thrilling enjoyment, so much more abiding than any other we know, of losing ourselves in the primal elements of this Dimension is *the extreme opposite* of anything mystical.

Nor is there anything in the least mystical about our present realistic attack on the arrogant claim of the Dimension we live in to be regarded as all there is. It is in this insolent claim — not in our attack upon it — that the mysticism lies

When the common sense of ordinary humanity assures us that this present world of earth and fire and water and boundless ether is only one Dimension in a Multiverse of others there is nothing mystical about such a simple inkling of the truth

And when our individual consciousness alone with itself in the 'dark backward and abysm' of its ultimate detachment, refuses to allow any imaginary Demogorgon of that abyss to share its exultant loneliness, this is no merely rational refusal. No, with the wholesome obliteration of all the paraphernalia of visions and revelations and rumours the Real Next Dimension towards which, as we approach nearer to Death, we are daily travelling, becomes, for all its unknowableness, *the truest of facts*.

And it becomes a fact in the light of which the difference between Good and Evil shows itself a matter for the most cautious and casuistical discrimination. Let us begin then by discriminating between 'mysticism' and 'mystery' as their difference is illustrated by the problem of pain. Few deaths are easy deaths; and the fact that, in the nature of things, we are steadily moving, year by year, nearer to our death, is a fact that brings the mystery of pain — and the sharper that mystery the less can mysticism help us — into a living relation with the problem of Good and Evil.

The worst of even the best Philosophical System as far as the mystery



of Good and Evil is concerned — and save for St. Paul and his pupil Dostoevsky the seers by whose teaching we Westerners are influenced are all guilty of this — is its neglect of the two terrible Horns upon whose points the *real* reality of our life in this present Dimension is impaled; the mystery of Pain and the Mystery of Chance

No wonder the man-in-the-street, and Heaven help us! the man in the farmyard too, not to speak of the woman at the wash-tub, has been from time immemorial addicted to 'touching wood' and to dodging Fridays and the Number Thirteen. Superstitions of this sort are the tragic-comic Responses of the frightened Congregation of Nature's Church, when it prostrates itself before these Horns of the Ultimate Altar.

Is it not sad that all the swaying and surging and shuddering of the human evolution of Conscience should have as its ground of departure two such outrages to our moral sense as Pain and Chance? *Oyez! Oyez!* The Great Trial is beginning!

And what will be the Verdict? The Verdict will be 'Guilty?' and it will be given by the only Judge we can trust, namely our own conscience.

But alas! the defendants are as pluralistic as the Multiverse itself and the judgment of the court must be against 'Powers and Beings unknown'. Yes, unknown are the causes responsible for this Dimension of ours in which Pain and Chance play the dominant role.

But this at least we know, that in nothing are our 'Unknown Powers and Beings' more guilty than in the prominence of these two demonic 'stink-horns'.

Before these devils all living flesh must bow; and alas! most modern philosophers, composing their logical and rational volumes upon what they call 'Ethics', as they weigh the claims of egoism and 'altruism', and airily sketch some ideal reconciliation between these reckless ones on the general lines of what is obscurely called 'self-realization' take good care to give only a derogatory glance at Chance and only a patronizing nod in the direction of Pain.

Meanwhile youth is so preoccupied with Sex and Revolution and middle-age so absorbed in Ambition and Responsibility, that these devilish Horns of Demogorgon escape attention. But to old age, as to early childhood, our present Dimension of the Multiverse is made up of events in which arbitrary Chance on the one hand and capricious Pain on the other supply the loading of the dice, while sex and art and revolu-

tion and ambition and convention and responsibility, recede into the misty distance.

Youth is apt to pity as insensible pachyderms the good folk whom it passes on its hypnotized way, and yet these are harmless ordinary persons going happily about their ordinary affairs; getting their enjoyment from Nature, taking sex for granted, and letting art and revolution alone.

Middle-age is liable to glance with unconcealed irritation both at the maniacal obsessions of youth and at the obstinate detachment of old age. Whereas old-age itself, if it has learnt the lesson of its years, deliberately returns to the primal innocence of that life of sensation, wherein the interplay of Chance and Pain can never be forgotten.

The attainment of perspective — *that* is the natural aim of all living things; and the only true perspective, the only true focus, from which to regard Good and Evil and to discriminate properly between them, is to fix our attention on Chance and Pain.

Consider the evil of envy, for example. Think of the bitterness, the maliciousness, the seething hatred, the longing to 'bring down the pegs which make this music' when envy ferments within us. *He* has all the luxuries and the comforts; *he* has all the honours and the glories. To the swiftest devils in hell with him!

But if in place of comparing our lot with the lot of those to whom Chance has been kinder and with whom Pain has been a less frequent guest we habitually compare ourselves with those who have been victimized by Chance and harrowed by Pain we shall come to feel it as a gross and sacrilegious outrage upon life to lavish our energy in the negative exercise of sardonic spleen instead of spending it in an intensification of the few sensations left to us. This is the real doctrine of Epicurus; to be profoundly grateful when Chance in the smallest matters is propitious and when Pain for the moment passes us by.

But this is merely the mental *background* of the crafty soul who has learnt the grand conjuring-trick. The habitual effort of such a soul's imaginative will-power is directed to something more particular than this, to a rarefaction, a subtilization of the positive sensations under its hand!

To get the problem of Good and Evil into its proper focus the deftest mastery we can possibly apply to our attitude towards Chance and Pain is indispensable. But envy of the good luck of others is only one among

the obvious forms of evil that we learn to dodge under this experienced orientation of our energy.

In place of a background of seething bitterness and maudlin self-pity there is substituted a background of liberation and relief; and beyond this negative comfort it is from the enjoyment of our few indestructible sensations that we turn the sympathetic eye of the *satisfied*, not the cold antipathy of the *unsatisfied*, upon such as need our sympathy.

The poor are sympathetic to the poor not because they are full of self-pity for their own lack of 'great' pleasures, but because they are full of the enjoyment of 'little' pleasures; *all* pleasure being, in its essential nature, *equal*. That neither all men nor all beasts enjoy these equal pleasures equally, as justice demands, is due to the chance, or the Fate if you like, of the temperament with which they were born.

But in spite of this cosmogonic injustice the art of pleasurable sensation can be immeasurably cultivated, both by those who start 'from scratch', and those who start with the temperamental dice heavily loaded in their favour. Indeed the former, by the curious natural law of *the survival of the unfittest*, frequently overtake the latter.

Well then! Granting that the two Pillars of Hercules, or if you prefer a pessimistic symbol, the Scylla and Charybdis of our voyage through the sea of life are Chance and Pain, how, with these unheavenly twins in the offing, are we to steer our way, reconsider our bearings, and revise our navigation-chart? Where, in plain words, with the experience of old age to help us, does the ordinary Navigation Map of Good and Evil call for correction?

Let us consider first which of the traditional Ten Commandments can be safely and conscientiously shelved. Well! The commandments that have to do with 'loving' and 'propitiating' God and with the wickedness of 'profaning the Sabbath' can quite safely be discounted.

Astrologically speaking these commandments have to do with the kind of heavenly bodies which if we were steering our lifeboat by the stars might fairly be considered as dark or burnt-out constellations. Indeed we might go further than this and state positively that all the feelings implied in the word 'worship', especially those of awe and reverence, might well be withdrawn from our attitude to any creative cause of these wonders and concentrated upon the 'heavens above' and 'the earth beneath' and upon the waters that are around the earth. *Not*

*to kill* is another Mosaic command that should clearly, in the danger-zone of Chance and Pain, be reconsidered in a thousand specific cases. And the same applies to the unqualified prohibition about 'committing adultery' and the unqualified condemnation, based too obviously upon the questionable 'status-quo' of the *Haves* as against the *Have-nots*, of stealing.

When however we arrive at last at the altogether-admirable *sixteenth commandment*: 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour,' we reach an Imperative that not only must be accepted in its entirety, but even enlarged upon and extended. We may also, it seems to me, register our obedience without the smallest reserve to the final Mosaic injunction: 'Thou shalt not covet.'

But let us turn now from the Old Testament to the New Testament, remarking as we do so that 'Thou shalt not be cruel' would quite sufficiently 'take care of', as we say in the United States, both the Law not to kill and the Law not to commit adultery.

Jesus was asked more than once in the Gospels what he made of 'the Law and the Prophets' and we all know the gist of his reply: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.' To this we may add the equally famous injunction: 'Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you.'

Now it would seem — omitting all supernatural Causes, whether Divine or Devilish, of Pain and Chance — that we are confronted here in these words of Jesus, by an Imperative to which the most sensitive and highly-developed conscience among us instinctively and instantly responds.

But Jesus goes further still, defining clearly — as he does in the only one of all his Parables that is entirely acceptable — just who 'our neighbour' is. And 'our neighbour' turns out to be, as our conscience would naturally expect — only we must extend the admonition to all sentient creatures — the nearest victim that Chance and Pain throw in our way.

And be it especially noted that the particular victim of Pain and Chance described in this greatest of Parables is not alluded to as a *meritorious* object of our casual charity, but simply and purely as a fellow-creature in bad luck.

He may have been — he very probably was — of a different race, colour, language, way of life, from the worthy natives who passed him

by, and even from the low-bred outsider who assisted him. He may have been — he very probably was — a murderer, an adulterer, a liar; or as is more likely a totally unprincipled political boss. He may even have been an extremely rich and selfish miser. On the other hand, of course, the thieves among whom he fell may have had their eye upon an exceptionally plump beggar's wallet.

But a further point to notice is that the undistinguished person who conveyed this wretched creature to the Inn showed no tendency to meddle in his affairs or the least concern about the state of his soul.

In this best of all parables, so beautifully free from the overshadowing presence of any tyrant of a 'block-universe', we are initiated simply and plainly into the *only definition* of that ambiguous 'Love' — too closely connected with unambiguous 'Hate' — which it is within the power of a scrupulous conscience wholly to accept.

To 'love' is clearly not a matter of the will, but *to be kind*, whether we can 'love' or not, is within our scope; and to be kind to all beings that Chance throws in our way, purely because, like ourselves, *they need it*, is indeed a true epitome of 'all the Law and the Prophets'.

But advancing a little further in our presumptuous attempt to catch the living secret of the greatest moral revolution the world has known, we come upon the startling *logos*: 'Love your enemies!'

Let us hasten to follow the lead of this incomparable Parable and substitute for 'Love your enemies' the much more possible command: 'Be kind to your enemies.' This imperative does not require us to 'turn the other cheek' — a proceeding which, as Nietzsche so shrewdly protests leaves us with anything but a humble feeling towards our adversary and indeed 'heaps coals of fire upon his head'.

But it does require us, whether we are the victors or the vanquished in the inevitable battle of life, to behave to our enemy as we would wish our enemy to behave to us. It is as a rule much harder to be kind to the lucky than to the unlucky; but what our most intimately Christianized conscience commands us is *to be kind to all*. 'Knock your enemy down and be kind to him afterwards' is the common sense version of this comprehensive command. Once down and the man is again your 'neighbour'; and the moment for 'pouring in oil and wine' and paying his bill at the Inn has arrived.

This leads us to all those startling benedictions of what is called 'the

Sermon on the Mount', and if we are really shameless and honest in our struggle to apprehend just exactly how our evolved conscience reacts to these extreme imperatives we must consider very carefully and very critically at least one or two of these famous utterances.

One thing at any rate ought to be said at once. The deepest, noblest and wisest of all Christian secrets is humility; and it must be confessed at once that when Jesus told his disciples that they were 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world' he was inaugurating that particular kind of Evangelical Complacency which even at the moment of turning the other cheek and 'loving' its persecutors is aware of an unholy enjoyment of holy superiority.

This turning-the-other-cheek sort of passivity has indeed an unctuous triumph in it worthy of condemnation by any 'honest cod' and to the classical mind totally unacceptable as a noble or heroic virtue.

In fact such superiority carries in its tail a subtler sting than a thousand normal hit-backs. If it doesn't 'throw coals of fire on our heads' it certainly sows the seed of a deplorable irritant in the heathen mind, an irritant that tends to encourage rather than lessen the wicked feelings that our virtue excites.

Now the modest and hesitant criticism of these famous world-shaping *logoi* which I have ventured to submit to my readers is in truth nothing less than the verdict of the ordinary human conscience as the centuries have evolved it and is not so much a heathen resistance to the secret of Jesus as a legitimate development of *the spirit of that secret*; but such a development often requires the experience and detachment of old age for its elucidation.

Indeed the essence of my whole contention in this matter of Good and Evil is that the distinction between them, half-discovered and half-created by the human conscience, is a distinction that has never been *once for all delivered* to any particular Messiah, but has always been, and is still, a product of evolutionary development.

Articulating still further the essence of what I am trying to say, it seems that Old Age teaches us that the quarrel between Good and Evil is never quiescent and never settled in this present dimension; but that the essential Good and the essential Evil, when stripped and sifted and winnowed from all irrelevancies, can be reduced to the actual choice, which lies in the power of our will, between a *gesture of enjoyment* which

is at once defiant of and grateful to Chance and an impotent fury against Chance combined with a surrendering of ourselves to self-pity, misery, and hopelessness.

But satisfying as this ultimate difference may at present be to our common human conscience, it is not by any means complete. The deepest law of this present Dimension is the necessity of *Opposites*, the life-giving virtue of a certain basic Contradiction.

So to our 'Enjoy all!' as the first and last gesture of 'The man of good will' we must add our 'Be kind to all!' ere 'the essence Good' as distinct from 'the essence Evil' becomes manifest in its final irreducible elements. Of all great religious teachers the most monstrously wrong-headed was undoubtedly St. Augustine.

No old Classical moralist, no old Chinese moralist, no old Egyptian moralist, could possibly, could conceivably, have attributed to the Moral Government of the Universe a horror like this wicked saint's vision of unchristened babes, a span-long, on the floor of Hell! Therefore when we find St. Augustine teaching that evil is a negative thing we can refute him out of his own positively-evil conception of a positively-evil baby-torturing God.

It is the overpowering rôle played in our present Dimension by Pain and Chance, who together are indeed the Pillars of Hercules of our perilous human voyage, that makes this reduction of evil to something merely negative so fantastic a notion.

It is surely a matter of simple common sense in a world like ours never to let a day go by without forcing ourselves to imagine as well as we can what our attitude towards Good and Evil would be if by some devilry of Chance we found ourselves perishing in pain. How at such a moment all the discussion about egoism and altruism, about self-realization and self-frustration, about realism and idealism, about sensuality and asceticism, would fall away! What would be left would be just simply the two great Imperatives filling the whole conscience of the common man, namely the imperative to force ourselves to enjoy life to the bitter end and the imperative to feel, think, will, and act kindly towards those whom Jesus calls our 'neighbours', that is to say to all the fellow-entities we encounter. 'We may be leaving' — I might conjure you like an old preacher! — this particular Dimension at any moment and surely while we still live — forgive the old-fashioned Salvation tune — we *must*

recognize the positivity of evil. If the ultimate gesture on the one hand is to force ourselves to endure and if we can to enjoy life, the ultimate gesture on the other hand is to curse life in our self-pity; yes! to wish we could drag down the whole business into annihilation!

And what does this difference imply? It implies that the essences of both Good and Evil are nothing more than the habitual attitude we have, or force ourselves to have, *towards life*; the good attitude one of gratitude and mercy, the evil attitude one of self-pity and malicious resentment. A yet further implication in the above distinction is a little more subtle but not a jot less true, the implication of the greatest of human virtues on the one hand and the worst of human vices on the other — the divine quality of *humility* and the devilish quality of *pride*.

'Have I,' the devil in us howls: 'I, I, I to be so treated: May *all* be accurst!' 'The common lot, the common pain, the common chance!' murmurs the other: 'Be it unto me as Fate has decreed!'

But what has all this to do, you may naturally protest, with the perpetual contest within us between the urge of the conscience on the one hand and the drag of inert malice on the other?

It has everything to do with it! In the first place the clearly-imagined vision of ourselves, at the mercy of Chance and Pain, and on the brink of Death, gives to every moment of our conscious life, while these three eventualities hold aloof, a tenfold importance and preciousness.

In the second place the concentration, as our first and last imperative of conscience, upon forcing ourselves to make the *interior gesture of enjoyment* — whether we achieve this or not — is in itself an attitude which tends to lessen the tension of the selfish and unselfish impulses of the passing moment.

Nothing is more conducive to a sound common sense and to a detachment from all the misery and ferment of remorseful indecision than a reduction of the whole daily dilemma into the one basic imperative: *enjoy all: be kind to all*.

And be it noted that the first of these categorical injunctions has a natural priority — for we are men and not saints — over the second; while at the same time the obstinate and industrious habit of merging these two gestures together gradually creates — for it is the privilege of 'Homo Sapiens' to re-make himself into what he *imagines himself to be* — a substratum of life-magnetism that can be drawn upon at any crisis.



And I would like to be permitted to add that the experience of old age seems usually to suggest that our 'neighbours' in their various moods and needs and crises find more satisfaction in the presence of such a 'substratum' of life-enjoyment fused with an habitual kindness than by the gloomy motions of a remorseful conscience working itself out in 'altruism'.

But to return to the Sermon on the Mount. Any criticism of this famous discourse will no doubt strike certain of my readers not only as a dangerous and blasphemous insolence but as an indecent flouting of good taste.

And yet what surely must sometimes trouble an ordinary man's conscience, based as that conscience is on the spirit rather than the letter of the New Testament, is the implication made by Jesus throughout these startling blessings that we were wise to do right, *not* 'because right is right in scorn of consequence' but because certain very definite advantages will accrue to ourselves from following such a line.

Nor can it be denied that the living water of the Gospels is tinged and stained, like a fair tide that has crossed the purlieus of an ancient dyeing-vat, by these promises of advantages to come.

'Mourn *now*,' we read, 'for you will be comforted *later*.' 'Be meek *now*; for you shall inherit the earth.' 'Be merciful *now*, so that God may be merciful to you at the last.' 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great will be your reward in heaven.'

But as Shakespeare hinted in Richard the Second's soliloquy in prison, it is within the scope of the conscience of any ordinary person, certainly of any ordinary *old* person who has had some experience of this confused world, 'to set the Word against the Word'.

Consider for instance the profound significance of the very first of these startling sayings. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

Now it is clear that this 'Kingdom of Heaven' is a condition of felicity for which we do *not* have to wait as the reward of our virtue. 'The Kingdom of Heaven' is a *state of being* now; not a paradise at the end of a pilgrimage.

And here indeed we sink plummet-deep into that revolutionary secret of Jesus that turns all the values of the world and all our previous valuations of Good and Evil upside down. The 'Kingdom of Heaven' becomes

in fact nothing more or less than this same reservoir of magnetic power which the most ordinary men and women create in themselves by forcing themselves 'to enjoy all and be kind to all'

And what, 'when we come down to it', actually are these *Ptōcho Pneumatoi*, these 'poor in spirit'? Surely they are the souls who have freed their consciousness from that 'last infirmity' of noble saints, the feeling themselves to be the light of the world and 'the salt of the earth'!

We may have detached ourselves from all other forms of 'distinction', from all other superiorities to the 'common herd', but until we detach ourselves from this last superiority, that of *spiritual pride*, until we recognize the 'equality of all souls', our enjoyment of the primeval elements of life is still obstructed, is still side-tracked. There seems no doubt that all we Aryans — whether we be East Indians or Europeans, whether we be Teutons or Latins, whether we be Anglo-Saxons or Celts — can find no parallel to our imperative to be '*Ptōchoi Pneumatoi*', 'poor in spirit' except in the early 'Tao', or 'Way', of the non-Confucian Chinese.

That is why, one may be tempted to think, the best hope for a real Democratic Federation of the World, a Federation based upon the spirit of the Un-possessive Individual rather than upon the compulsion of the Possessive Government, lies in the fact that we have as our allies the Chinese; and that the Non-Aryan methods of Chiang Kai-shek will have at least something to do with the New Internationalism.

## OLD AGE AND OTHER PEOPLE

THE worst tribulations that come to us when we begin to grow old do not so much proceed — putting aside incessant pain or complete mental derangement — from tremendous external disasters, as from our daily contact with other human beings.

Old people possess, it is true, several formidable weapons — one might almost call them *engines* — of self-defence, such as power over the purse-strings, filial piety, the art of exciting pity, self-absorption in physical sensation, and a certain shamelessness, or, as our enemies would call it, a certain thick-skinned toughness in regard to the impression we make on others.

So powerful indeed are these weapons of defence that when they are used as weapons of *offence*, and when an old man or an old woman in complete control of the cash-box or in a position to play upon the habit of submission in a life-draimed daughter, or, finally, endowed with the selfish callousness of an aged crocodile, there is no end to their power for abominable tyranny.

But if our old person either by misfortune or good-natured weakness lacks these essential advantages, it is likely enough he will find himself, or she will find herself, 'more sinned against than sinning'.

What then are the most successful devices by which the self-respecting old man or old woman can avoid becoming at death a 'happy release' to everybody concerned, and yet manage to enjoy the winter of their days?

I think the first and by far the most effective of these sage devices is to acquire the art of independence; in other words the power of living to himself, and of enjoying himself, *when he is left alone*.

To free our more active mate or our more youthful companion from the constant burden of what in my youth it was the custom to call 'dancing attendance' is a line of behaviour extremely fruitful of good results.

It used to be said, before the insurrection of the young, that children

should be seen and not heard'. Well! Gammer and Gaffer must endeavour in these days to apply this admirable dictum to themselves and 'make themselves scarce' not only to the ears, but as far as possible to the eyes also, of those about them.

For after all we old people have to consider not only 'the spirit of the age' in which we live, but also the character of the race to which it is our destiny to belong. Has the New China of Chuang Kai-shek — our happiest model for the democratic future — changed so much from the Old China that parents are no longer treated with ceremonious and cheerful devotion? I greatly doubt it. We are aware, too, that in French domestic life the old people play, even in their decline and weakness, the part of veritable angels and devils.

But in America and to a great extent in Britain's Dominions, this is the hey-day of youthful independence. Young people go their own way, live their own life; and though they do not actually neglect, far less forget, their parents, their chief interest lies among those of their own age.

It is necessary, therefore, for old people of our Anglo-Celtic habits of life to imitate their offspring and be as independent of them as possible. Does this mean that old people ought to live with other old people as they do in Alms-Houses!

Heaven forbid! It means that old people, as far as their bodily infirmities permit, *should live alone*. This does not mean that they should retire to a hermit's cell; it only means that they should practise that sublime art — the subtlest, deepest, wisest, most necessary art in the world — *the art of living a double life*.

Here indeed lies the chief difference between a sagacious and a foolish old age. One class of old people, giving full rein to their garrulousness, their vanity, their self-importance, as also to their hopeless dependence for amusement and entertainment upon the luckless persons who look after them, cling like blood-sucking leeches to their friends and relations.

Another class, much less of a nuisance, but most dreadful 'spoil-sports', remain obstinately and sulkily shut-up in themselves. They may be concealing hidden pearls; but as with oysters at the bottom of a rock-pool, the beauty of these aesthetic excrescences is probably not even seen by the oysters' microscopic sea-lice.

The sensible line to take is at one and the same time to float like a bubble on the topical, circumstantial, local-chaotic swirls and eddies of each

particular day, reflecting in lively and vivid reciprocity its varying prismatic tints and also like a wily and undulating eel to keep one eye fixed on the mud at the bottom for plump windfalls of grub-carrion. In other words what any really crafty old person should do, who wishes like all living creatures 'to have it both ways', is to force himself — for however weak we are we *must* use force towards ourselves — to enter into the interests, feelings, pleasures, yes and sometimes even the pains, of those about us, while we continue, like an ancient pond-carp with its mouth open and its fins fanning the stream, to snatch in secret gulps, and absorb in digestive beatitude our own dedicated nourishment.

Where we haven't yet learnt to be interested we must begin by pretending interest; but a real interest — for such is the law of life, that the inward feeling follows the outward gesture — will soon be evoked. The grand trick is a magnetic vicariousness.

By this I mean the power of imbibing, like an aged tree-stump upon whose hoary substance the birds have dropped some living seeds, the fresh life-sap of the young.

We must have sadly misused our experience if we haven't already learnt what is perhaps the hardest of all lessons, namely that every other person is just as self-absorbed as we are ourselves.

What *they* are concerned with is just what *we* are concerned with, the mental and emotional satisfaction of self-expression, not the sympathetic satisfaction of listening to *others*.

We all want of course in a general way to make a favourable impression and to be admired and liked; but in the heat and excitement of the moment the universal craving to be listened to, just simply to be heard, while we complain and explain, confess and accuse, narrate and recall, soon sweeps away — at least *till afterwards* — all worrying speculation as to the impression produced by our monologue on the other person. Only to be heard! Only to fill the whole stage for one blessed interval! It is a grievous folly in old people to interrupt such outpourings with objections, opposition, criticism, and contradiction.

But though we have to hear a great many things that open up to us whole vistas of disagreement, our wisdom at the moment is to be a sympathetic sounding-board, and not — until our counsel is especially implored — a philosophical adviser.

But what about an aged couple who have grown old side by side?

Is it necessary for the less voluble of these to be an eternal listener? Not a bit of it!

Nothing in what I have just said applies to ancient lovers, to a time-bartered couple who in the manner of old desert ravens have grown into the Ideal Unity spoken of in the *Symposium* bone into bone, soul into soul, spirit into spirit, through the long years of their wrestling with life and with one another.

Unions such as this are rare, however, for they not only imply a supremely fortunate conjunction of stars but also an almost superhuman success in the delicate art of 'give and take'. This is an art where the stress is equally laid upon the 'taking' as upon the 'giving', for as no intelligently sensitive person can endure the feeling, as Nietzsche so beautifully says, of 'abashing' his enemy by superior meekness, so neither of the parties to the perduring union I have now in mind can bear to triumph over the other by any self-righteous assumption of moral superiority.

Such a union also implies a long-practised reverence and respect for those irreducible differences in physical, mental, and emotional taste, which not only divide the sexes but separate every individual person — man, woman or child — from every other.

At the beginning, when the passionate madness of love enables us to work miracles of unity, there are bound to arise those unreasoning 'lovers' quarrels' at which 'Jove laughs'. In such quarrels we are rending and tearing *ourselves*; for these are the days when each invades the other and in moments of ecstatic eternity *is* the other, as when Cathy in Emily Brontë's story astounds her hearer by crying aloud: 'I *am* Heathcliff!'

Such a passion of love is illuminated by the forked lightning of the impossible; but a less spectacular, though it may often be quite as tragic, a situation arises when death carries off one of a well-mated aged couple and leaves the other. The other is then much more than *alone*.

Both the living one and the dead one have often had the divinest moments of loneliness. But the beauty of loneliness has ceased to be the beauty of loneliness now. Every Positive depends on its Negative; every Negative on its Positive. Loneliness *left alone* is no longer loneliness. It is lost. Its senses have 'nothing to report'. It 'but usurps its life'.

That there should be so many survivors of this worst of separations doesn't alter the truth of what has just been said. The supreme magician is Time; and the power of Time is unbelievable. And the difference, too,

between men and women will show itself at this tragic juncture. Both sexes *can* recover from such a loss.

But such recovery is easier for the woman than for the man; and for a sufficient reason. The woman is an epitome of Nature, and we know Nature's resilience. The man is an epitome of the energy that wrestles with Nature, detaches itself from Nature, and seeks — with the limited success we see! — to change Nature.

But in Nature are his roots: in Nature the reality of his life. From her he draws the living sap of his struggle with her; and without her everything that happens lacks actuality. A woman may make a man's life miserable but she also makes it *real*. Houses, gardens, furniture, doorways, windows, chimneys, the faces of visitors, the lights and shades on the walls, a knock at the door, a leaf on the wind — all these familiar things are to a man like objects in a mirage or a mirror till made real to him by his woman. And when the woman is dead there is only a half-man left to die.

Turning, however, from these lucky couples who in their old age, if neither constant pain nor any other engine of the devil is at work on their nerves, are able to realize better than any other mortals the pleasure of being alive, let us consider from a new angle the relations of an elderly individual with the various personalities who come and go across his path.

What generally, I think, must strike all passionate and sensitive young people who encounter an old person is that person's toughness and self-centredness with regard to the abominable miseries and unspeakable injustices of the Dimension we live in.

Youth is addicted to an exalted indulgence in hyper-sensitive spasms of moral superiority. It finds it can soothe its conscience, oppressed by the sense of its own weakness and helplessness, by an irritable display of righteous indignation at what it feels to be the pachydermatous callousness of old age to the sufferings of the world.

Not only so, but youth's natural irritation at the spectacle of old age's concentration on material sensations and placid indifference to revolutionary idealism draws an added itch and an extra sting from its own impulsive blunders in the sphere of sensual abandonment. 'The path of excess' is by no means always, as William Blake would have it, 'the path to wisdom'. It is quite as often — more often perhaps — the path to desperate and equally unwise reactions.

And these reactions not infrequently take the form of a self-lacerating asceticism that poisons the springs of innocent delight. In this way the sensitive idealism of youth transforms itself into a sort of puritanical malice, a malice only too fatally close to that itching resentment of the conventional moralist when confronted by the sensual joys that he secretly envies and savagely denounces.

One of the hardest things in the world for youthful idealists is to be tolerant of those the pricks of whose conscience have been blunted by their experience of life. Their own discomfort drives them to regard such people as just stupidly smug.

Now hypocritical smugness — and it must be remembered that a youthful form of this unpleasant attribute is by no means impossible — is obviously, to any intelligent observer, both an aesthetic ugliness and a moral blight. But all complacency is not *necessarily* hypocritical. It can be frankly and freely accepted and recognized for what it is by a person temperamentally addicted to it; and there is no reason why it should not be regarded — like the contentment of an elderly cat who is placidly enjoying the fire — by any wandering, restless, and troubled spirit who glances at it where it lies, as a notable achievement of Nature and an excellent phenomenon to exist in the world.

It is a noticeable fault in human nature that while we feel nothing but shame at not identifying ourselves more fully with those in pain, we feel at liberty to poke, prod, prick, viciously disturb those peaceful if unimaginative fellow-creatures whose sensibility is less jumpy than our own.

Life on this earth can be so appalling, death so protracted and frightful, that in place of giving way to an envious fury masquerading as moral indignation we might just as well allow our own tormented nerves a sun-bath of vicarious satisfaction in the presence of these agreeable oases of human, or, if you must have it so, of *animal* contentment.

How well old people come to know that peculiar look of suppressed disgust which their obstinate concentration on some restricted sensual pleasure excites in the feverish idealism of the young and in the impatient pragmatism of the middle-aged!

What is their wisest method of mental defence against the shameful discomfort caused by this look? Well! They must bring the final essence of their long experience of life to bear on this point. They must remem-



ber, what their children and their children's children so easily forget, namely the ultimate terms of all human existence on the earth, the monstrous and wayward unfairness, far deeper than any social maladjustments, of the difference in pure brute chance between the luck of one man and the ill-luck of another. If social injustice was completely eradicated, if under a thoughtful and benevolent organization of production and distribution extreme poverty totally disappeared, there still would remain those thousand and one 'acts of God' — accidents, mishaps, maimings, crippling, aberrations, maladies, outrages, insanities, diseases, bolts from the blue, arrows from 'crass casualty', hideous concatenations of devilish suffering, lives cut short in pain, lives prolonged in pain, lives saved to no purpose but to bear more pain — which are beyond and below and outside, in the very stuff of the world, all our righteous re-shuffling of human institutions.

But what has this ghastly, this shattering difference between the pure luck of one living creature and the pure ill-luck of another, to do with the selfish enjoyment of an old monkey cracking nuts and catching lice, or of an old bitch contentedly scratching herself and mumbling a bone between her toothless jaws?

*It has nothing to do with it!* If in this present Dimension of the unfathomable Multiverse things are constantly happening which are due to pure Chance alone, things of such an appalling nature that they don't bear thinking on; and if life holds — as it does hold — interludes of such frightfulness that they carry the nerves of our electric sympathy, and the 'empathy' of our imagination to an unbearable point, why then there is no 'cynical selfishness', as people hypocritically call it, no momentary absorption in some blessedly-drugged sensation, which doesn't find its unanswerable justification.

Where alone such 'selfish sensation-mongering' can fairly be condemned is where it is accompanied by a hostile and malicious inward feeling, in place of a kind and friendly one, towards other living creatures. And one excellent way of getting rid of this inward feeling is to cultivate an automatic mental association between our own immediate pleasure and some definite and particular form of suffering by which other creatures — at that very hour and moment — are afflicted.

At a first view this might seem like Nero fiddling while Rome is burning; or like the Lucretian contemplation of a shipwreck from a

safe position on shore; or like the girl in *The Brothers Karamazov* who imagines herself watching a scene of torture while she eats pineapple.

But there is a difference. Such a habit *may* be a conscious strengthening of the invisible threads which bind together all the offspring of our Mother the Earth. The Creed speaks of the 'Communion of Saints', but there is no need to narrow down this feeling to 'Saints'.

It is on the contrary a communion 'of all Beings', a living link between all the creatures who are Chance-ruled and Pain-tormented in this Dimension of the Multiverse. 'But could anything', my critical reader may well be stirred to expostulate, 'be more hypocritical and even more monstrous than thus deliberately to associate the pain of others with our enjoyment? Can there not be detected in it a tincture, if no more, of that revolting sub-sadistic mood of the neurotic young lady in Dostoevsky's story?'

My answer to this is that I have so far purposely left out the more positive side of the habit I am recommending. But I would suggest that any sensation-addict, whose years and infirmities have reduced his link with his fellow-creatures to a minimum, may renew his 'communion of all souls' by habitually transforming a definite portion of the energy of his enjoyment into a magnetic wave of intense nerve-sympathy, or, to put it more plainly, into the transmission of an ardent prayer for the particular class of sufferers to whose pain his own nervous system is naturally most sensitive.

'But', my reader may interrupt once more, 'doesn't such use of the act of prayer, taken from traditional religion, imply a traditional faith in the objective existence of God?'

I cannot think so. But let us, in this important matter, which is of extreme interest to all old men, since any sort of prayer assumes the existence of the mysterious region wherein we are so soon 'to be gathered to our fathers', examine a little more closely the essential nature of what we call 'prayer'.

Our present subject, it must be remembered, is the relation of old age to other people, and it seems only right to include among these 'others' the vast unimaginable host of 'the great majority', those whom Homer calls 'the powerless heads of the dead'. But all the dead are included for us in the dead to whom we owe life; and the older we grow the more tender, the more frequent, the more intense grow our thoughts of our

parents. We even begin to take our parents' side in all their quarrels with those weird strangers — ourselves!

We come to understand them better, to respect them more, to criticize them less. We shall soon 'be with them', either in complete oblivion or in some other dimension of life; and in examining the real essence of prayer it is worth remembering that in the old races and the ancient pieties prayers *to* rather than prayers *for* the dead parents was the immemorial custom. The instinct behind this custom is nothing less than the pressure and impulse of all souls towards a planetary communion with all other souls whether alive or dead. It is an impulse to recognize and strengthen the tragic bond that unites the separate living consciousnesses of this whole present dimension.

Now although we may come to feel at one with all the other sentiences who are now enjoying, or who have enjoyed, the pleasure which there is in life itself, we are compelled by the very fact of our limitation by those Time-and-Space categories according to which we feel and grasp this present Dimension, to assume as the absolute ground of all our speculation that it is laughable to regard this present space-time barrier as the end and final high-tide-mark of all possible existence.

In the process, therefore, of directing our prayers towards 'all souls' whether living in pain or dying in pain, or safe at last out of our pain-dimension, it is impossible not to associate these secret invocations with this same space-time barrier which so inescapably surrounds us.

But it is equally impossible for the mind to recognize this barrier without recognizing also, though no words, no speculation, no imagination, *no mystical intuition* can express what lies behind it, that *there is and must be*, unless the mystery of life be absurdly restricted, something or other behind it. Well then! It is just this 'something or other', this absolutely certain, though at present unrealizable, 'Beyond', which is the necessary background of prayer.

As old as the conscious history of the human race is the ancient banked-up tradition that the business of the aged, when labour and war and amorous pleasure have deserted them, is to enjoy the warmth of the hearth and of the sun, to eat their bread with thankfulness, to offer what counsels they can to those about them, and above all, and as an accompaniment to all, *to pray*.

And the real truth is — let us boldly, let us blasphemously admit —

that the Object or the Objects to whom these prayers are made is an unimportant matter. The important thing is the actual psychic phenomenon of *prayer in itself*.

Granting once for all the conclusive proof given us by Kant — the greatest of metaphysicians — that the human mind in its essential nature is fatally bound up with the Space-Time of our present Dimension and in the second place that our simple common sense rejects the notion of this temporal and spatial dimension being *all there is*, it is clear that the act of prayer, so natural to us all, can have no intelligible object.

Our Sunday Schools assure us that since Jesus revealed the existence of a Loving Father in whose safe keeping we all are it is still possible, in spite of the pains and cruel Chances of times like these, to remain calm and cheerful.

Well! The task laid upon our thinkers at the present moment of history is to show us how to remain calm and cheerful. And not only so; but it is their duty to show us how to remain calm and cheerful *without belief* in a Loving Father at the back of the world.

And one of the ways to this desirable end is a practical, *not a mystical*, use of the act of prayer. The more individuals there are who habitually practise prayer the more powerful is the magnetic current they create. When God is taken from us there is but one sensible thing to do — to become gods ourselves!

And the sort of prayer I am now suggesting for Old Age is really and truly 'god-like'. Strictly speaking it is a practical process of commanding fate. We do not coax the unknown demiurge of this dimension: we command. And if the god-like commands of even one of us possess generative and creative power, how much more the commanding prayers of a great many of us.

It is indeed in this way that some of the most momentous events in the history of humanity have been brought about; not least among them the appearance of Jesus himself, as the long-prayed-for 'expectation' of Israel. That the nature of this particular triumph has turned out a moral rather than a political one does not change the fact. Though prayer — which is after all only an intense form of imaginative projection — generates the event, it by no means always does so according to the precise material intention behind the prayer.

Applying this principle to the tragic situation to-day it would seem

that the concentrated prayers of a subjected Europe for the overthrow of the oppressor, while they make it impossible for Hitler to win, cannot be regarded as dictating the manner of the Nazi collapse, still less the nature of the Allies' success.

Thus it would appear — as far as our own old age is concerned — wiser and safer and more in accordance with the nature of things to pray in general for Hitler's defeat than for any specialized triumph of the British Empire. Yes, I have discovered by experience that there really does exist a type of prayer that is totally different from supplication and that it must be used with caution.

By a reiterated and concentrated series of *commands* the demiurgic power can be compelled to steer events according to the 'intention' of the 'stream of tendency not ourselves that makes for righteousness' whether this 'intention' is its own 'intention' or not.

And what is the demiurgic power behind our particular dimension? Ah! Just there lies the mystery of the whole thing. We do not know. We are engaged in a telepathic-magnetic experiment. And if we permit our modern Holy Office of Biological Science to make what cruel experiments it pleases on the nerves of sensitive animals, why should people be so contemptuous — on the strength of barbarous *physical* experiments made in the last hundred years — of a *psychic* experiment as old as the human race?

And why should we assume that because our prayers in the nature of the case, that is to say in the face of our absolute ignorance of what lies beyond our senses, cannot be addressed to any particular invisible Being, they are fruitless and vain? Even in our present Dimension — as Science itself has been compelled to admit — there are endless unknown forces at work such as are more amenable to mental magnetic waves than to shocking and appalling experiments in physical laboratories.

In a dimension of life like ours, where events seem ruled by a mixture of blind chance and reckless impulse, all manner of disastrous events can happen. Well! we must take the plastic stuff of destiny into our own hands, and by steadily forming an *imaginative image* of what we desire to happen, and therefore *choose shall happen*, create the event.

How was it brought about, in an incredibly remote past, that the race of termutes should be able to give to their ant-heap civilization such frightful monotony of longevity? Well! Just by a lucky or tragic con-

catenation of a fortuitous sequence of occasions in which it was possible to immobilize an imperishable habit.

Such indeed, and not otherwise, only on our human level, does Hitler promise his infatuated fellow-countrymen to immobilize and stabilize the German domination of a slave-continent. And to sterilize it too!

It is for this reason — lest we on our side fall into a too rigidly totalitarian Federation of the New World — that it seems wise ere we grow surer than we are at present, in this confused vortex of swirling eddies as to which way the significant straws of human desire are floating to pray just now solely and simply for Hitler's defeat.

For myself I cannot help thinking that the long ripple of hopeful-looking destiny amid our criss-cross eddies that comes from the New China of *General Kai-shek and Madame Kai-shek* shows more of that 'yield and give', more of that faith in the spontaneous instinct of the common people, which is our safest orientation, than any other movement of the dark tide.

Capitalistic Democracy, with all its faults, is at least a rough-and-ready obstacle to Bureaucratic Despotism and State Tyranny. And what above all we must pray may be discovered is some flexible system of checks and balances by which the rights of individual men and women are habitually and legally protected from State Control.

Men and women left to themselves — that is to say liberated from the excessive pressure of *propaganda from above* — have a shrewd instinct about the true way.

I have only one reiterated prayer myself for our new Democratic World; namely that the powers of every leader and ruler shall be restricted and that the ordinary person shall have what the ordinary person wants, not necessarily what he *ought* to want, but what he actually *does* want!

One is tempted at moments — I confess I am myself — to pray to God with the old traditional and pathetic trust in a Providence of Evolution. And indeed it would seem that reckless chance and wayward human instinct — the latter snatching at the chaotic opportunities afforded by the former — might very well be regarded as the supreme mediums upon earth for the mysterious 'Stream of Tendency making for Righteousness'. Prayer in itself then, as a psychological exertion of the magnetic power of the soul, is an incalculable creative force. It is an electric current, generated

by the creative life-energy within us and capable of being directed towards any aim.

True it is that our traditional prayers to the God of our fathers have their special poignance. The stored-up longings for 'pardon and peace', longings that the good shall prevail over the evil, and the joy of life over the pain of life, as these feelings have been expressed by the piety of the ages and the eloquence of the Church, move us still like familiar music.

But in the sort of praying I have in mind just now there is something that fulfils another and more realistic purpose. Again, if you have any serious philosophy of your own, all those invocations such as are derived from popular magic and in which we childishly hope to ward off evil chances will inevitably be uncongenial.

Such practices are natural and human enough; but they are a weakness and a source of weakness rather than of strength or power. They belong to the ambiguous realm of what Cicero called 'Divination', and though from time immemorial they have been the infirmity of Conquerors and Kings as well as of old wives and obsessed dabblers in the occult, they are the extreme opposite 'prayer' in the sense in which I am using that word here.

The prayers I am thinking of are an essential part of the life of the old. They are prayers for others, not for ourselves. They are a natural accompaniment to, and an instinctive 'Grace' for, our simple sensuous delights. They are an always possible expression of whatever universal good-will we have been able to retain amid the natural petulances and peevishnesses of our many infirmities.

It must, however, always be remembered that this psychological motion of the mind and will has nothing to do with the Supernatural, beyond the bare recognition of its *necessary existence*.

The essential implication in the practice of prayer is simply that it possesses a mysterious and incomprehensible power for good in the case of those — whether alive or dead — for whom it is exerted, and a practical and continuous power for good in its reaction upon ourselves.

The one thing, as I have already dared to hint, that it is quite unnecessary to keep in mind when engaged in prayer is the *object to whom or to which* our prayers are directed. Some of us may be tempted to make this object a person we have known in the flesh, such as a parent we have come especially to revere; such as an ancestor or a hero of our race.

SOME of us may be tempted — for admiration and gratitude *have* ere now led people to indulge in this eccentricity — to pray to a living though absent person, whom, as we say, we 'worship'.

But prayers like these can never be more than romantic idealizations. Again, when it comes to *praying for ourselves*, it would seem that the only wise and sensible prayer is the prayer that we may have the power, in spite of everything, to 'enjoy all and be kind to all'.

To pray that we shall get this or that particular benefit for ourselves, or be spared this or that particular Chance or Pain, is at once to reduce the whole thing to the level of such superstitious observances as 'touching wood', muttering 'D.V.', throwing salt across our shoulder, watching the flight of magpies, or turning money over in our pocket!

That the power of prayer possesses a rational, and indeed, if in these days of monstrous scientific crime the word hadn't so evil a connotation, I might say a 'scientific' justification, is proved by the daily experiences of telepathic communication which come to all of us.

I am not in the faintest degree introducing the Occult, the Mystic, the Supernatural in saying this. In all these matters the important thing is to distinguish clearly between what is mystical and what is mysterious. The former is charged with every sort of illusion and with every kind of ambiguity and trickery. The latter is an incontrovertible fact.

The World, with everything in it, is indeed a mystery; but it is *not* a mystery that can be solved either by Mysticism or by Science. Mysticism is too saturated with sex and with the restraints of sex, too porous to subtle suggestions from the suppressed senses. Science is too limited by its own axiomatic methods of research.

Neither of them, nor both of them together, have it in their scope to solve the riddle of existence. No powers we possess can do this; and for a sufficient reason.

Every avenue of our human exploration of the Mystery of Life — whether it be by mystical intuition, rational logic, or scientific experiment — is fatally conditioned by the ubiquity of Time and Space or, if you prefer, of the newly-amalgamated 'Space-Time'.

Upon what then in the final issue can we depend? We can depend upon the plainest, simplest, calmest, most abiding power we possess — the power of a certain sublimated and detached common sense.

And it is this power, containing all these various impulses and methods



in a direct and simple synthesis, which gives us our absolute certainty, a certainty surer than that 'I am I', or that 'You are you', or that '*it* is neither of us', that the Space-Time Dimension by which we are now so hopelessly conditioned *is not all there is*.

And since this present astronomical universe is not all there is, and since the knowledge *that it is not* comes to us neither as an exceptional revelation nor as the conclusion of scientific or logical reason, but as the daily assurance of the ordinary person's common sense, it shows itself to be identical with that ultimate agnosticism about life which we discover in Rabelais and Shakespeare as well as in the basic attitude of the common man.

Once let this be admitted and a great breath of liberating air rushes in upon our limited consciousness and a divine escape is rendered possible. We know that we know nothing. And into this Super-Nescience, as into a heavenly darkness of pure freedom, flow indescribable waves of 'good hope', together with *the right to pray*.

Let old age therefore come down to the bed-rock of its hearthstone! It can do little now for other people save in tentative counsels derived from its experience, but if it would be saved from querulousness and peevishness, from self-pity and conceit, it will find the lingering river of its existence wondrously freshened and deepened by that final tidal-wave of all human wisdom, the recognition of our absolute ignorance.

In such ignorance it finds an unassailable justification for the practice of a methodical and private system of ceremonious prayer, prayer addressed, as it *must* be, to the Nameless and Unimaginable, but prayer concentrated on those particular sufferings of men and beasts that strike our personal nerves most sharply.

The whole art of growing old with dignity and decency, of growing old with the minimum of discomfort to others, lies in the two greatest of human virtues, humility and gratitude. Let government and politics be the responsibility of youth. Let age be the champion of anarchy and liberty!

With what subtle delicacy does Homer, in spite of all his indulgence for the aged Nestor's garrulousness and prolixity, suggest at the perilous crisis when Telemachus dodges a return to the hospitable palace on the sands, how troublesome and tactless in his despotic kindness an old warrior can be!

Nestor was certainly a lusty and vigorous old warrior; but most of us

in our latter years are so hopelessly dependent upon our relatives that it is sheer folly not to make their devotion as light and easy as we can.

Every old person ought to swear a solemn oath by Death and Hades to take no service, no! not the most inevitable, for granted. Gratitude is the cue. There is a strange magnetic current that lifts half the weight from the shoulders of service!

Moreover the effort of merging our peevishness and self-pity in the expression of gratitude has a magic effect upon ourselves. And more than that! There is a strange psychic law by which we can actually draw into ourselves fresh streams of life-force from the younger people about us as long as we don't switch off the vibration by taking their help for granted.

One thing, unless we are blind and deaf — and even then there remains a living residue of telepathic communication — one thing, I say, we can always do. *We can listen*. Middle-age tends to become curiously dull and unpervious to the enjoyments and troubles of youth. But if we bring it about that the smallest ministration to our well-being by youthful hands is instantaneously repaid by the response of a *lively attention* we shall have won at once an incredible advantage.

Why is it that over and over again not only young children but boys and girls, youths and maidens, turn away, like the young boy in Proust, from their parents to their grand-parents? Because these latter *have time to listen*! Yes, we can arrange it so that the whole business of the exchange between youth and age is fair and equal. *Our* active life is over, *our* desires are reduced to the most primitive and simple sensations. *We* have no longer any axes to grind, any fish to fry. *Our* practical responsibilities have been reduced to their limit. But behold! this is the dedicated moment to convert our unpromising presence into an Aladdin's Cave of gleaming mirrors and dazzling candelabra, a Palace of reflected Lights and beguiling echoes, where our young visitor can see himself and hear himself and feel himself; where there is nothing to interrupt him and where everything applauds him and where his life-illusion reaches the ceiling!

Yes, he can feel himself to be a figure in a more vivid and more exciting drama than he can give substance to alone, still less create in the minds of his preoccupied parents; a drama that answers to those uncaught exultations and impalpable visions that have all his life come and gone upon the wind.

Some old people, as the 'good servant Kent' declared so roundly of his master, Lear, have the mysterious gift of authority with the young. Others can only rid themselves of youth's importunity by losing their temper; and this latter type, if it be kindly and considerate, is often most mischievously put upon before it is driven to the point of explosion.

The only thing for these indulgent ones to do is either to act the possession of a firmness they lack, or to have recourse to sly inventions and crafty devices.

Old age has its rights against youth, just as youth has its rights against old age; and if anything is the legitimate privilege of its years it is surely its right to solitude and quiet. *Quiet!* This of all things is the grand bone of contention between life at its beginning and life at its close. 'Hush! You're disturbing Grandfather!' is one of those immemorial tollings of the great bell of Time that children know so well.

In its secret heart youth sees no overmastering reason why old age *shouldn't* be disturbed, and every reason why its own high spirits should assert themselves freely. It becomes in any case an extraordinarily equal battle between the two; but, as we are perpetually discovering in the present war, an offensive policy seems always, in a desperate crisis, to be the wiser plan of campaign.

Yes, the offensive is the word — but only after we have acquired, in addition to the wisdom of experience, the much more important wisdom of self-control.

And here I touch upon a very nice and subtle point: namely the combination, down to the very depths of our nature, of humility with this same self-control! 'Greater is he,' said the proverbial Solomon, 'who ruleth his own spirit than he who taketh a City.' But this fine principle of victory needs to be seriously qualified, unless we intend to relinquish the psychic evolution of two thousand years, by an interior motion of a yet deeper force within us, a force whose secret lies in rejecting that very victory, even at the moment of its triumph over the less self-controlled, by the complete obliteration of the malicious conceit of superiority.

And how is this miracle to be achieved? Well! I can suggest at least one way. Try to visualize your impassioned and less controlled companion as though he or she has by chance, after some tumultuous passage between you, fallen into a deep sleep.

Oh, there is nothing like this innocent replica, so hushed and yet

breathing and waim, of the mysterious detachment of death, to throw our relation with another person into its essential proportion!

It is at such moments, when all the cantankerousness of our nature disappears below the waters of Life, that the true pathos of a human being's identity comes to the surface and floats before us, passive and helpless, upon the waves of Time and Space! The terrible energy of the demonic clutch of the 'ego' upon what it calls 'its own' is suspended then; and what appears in this motionless and silent form is the person's self of very self, beautiful and harmless, with the dew of creation upon it and its breast rising and falling to the pure rhythm of the breath of life.

It is then we realize the true 'apologia', yes! and the irrefutable justification, of this inviolable and unviolating 'Imago Vitae'. We realize then the full pity of its eternal struggle to escape from the bondage of its own nature and the bondage of its fate. We realize the tragic importance of all its scanty pleasures, solaces, reliefs; we realize the terrible intensity of those sweet and secret sensations of well-being that are *all the world to it*, and yet so little — less than a passing flicker of concern — to every other soul upon earth!

Well! what the battered conscience of any old person who has sought to bring himself into touch before he dies with the long-ebbing salt tide of the old pagan and classic virtues as well as with the new fresh-water springs of the teaching of Jesus and Paul aims at doing now is to identify itself, down to the deepest depths, with the life-illusion, the life-urge, the desperate life-clutch, of this other person's troublesome 'ego', now so serenely obliterated.

To do this, even in the feeblest degree, it is necessary for our old man or old woman to *will away*, clean out of court, all their own obstinate self-pity and self-conceit, all their own touchy 'sense of justice', all the seething and fermenting self-righteousness, all the bitter grievances and long-brooded-over bruises that former clashes with this other's ego have left.

What is the use of being the elder of two persons if this cannot be done? And the point is that we suddenly discover that this common sense imperative of our evolutionary conscience is not only to the advantage of the other, but to the immeasurable advantage, here and now, of ourselves.

But there is another 'psychological mole-run' we ought to attempt just here; and that is one that once more concerns the difference between men

and women. It is one, too, that may well prove of the utmost value to both sexes when in their old age they are driven to make the best of the few sensuous enjoyments that are left where sex-desire fails.

The difference to which I am now referring is a difference discernible at the very start of conscious life, and has to do with the social awareness of women and little girls, compared with the self-centred egotism of men and little boys.

Not for nothing does the story of the Garden of Eden and the story of Bluebeard's Cupboard point to the same conclusion.

Now what is the primal feminine urge in both these melancholy tales? Curiosity! That is to say, a completely non-moral, but absolutely absorbing, interest in the sheer spectacle of life. A purely aesthetic or a purely philosophical interest is a very different thing. There are, of course, women who possess these; but I suspect they are a small minority.

No, the purely aesthetic and the purely philosophical tendency, along with the hunting-instinct, and the moral-legal instinct, and the scientific instinct, and even along with the play-instinct — for though little girls 'play', as we call it, at 'houses' and with their dolls, this is not really 'play' at all, but simply a *premonitory practising* of mature life — may, I think, be regarded as masculine preoccupations.

Of course both eccentric old men and eccentric old women grow accustomed to be looked upon as comic Pantaloon and grotesque Aunt Sallies by the young.

Well! Just here can be most beautifully observed the difference between little girls and little boys. Take any eccentric old gentleman or old lady at whom it is pardonable for children to stare askance. The little girls will point and giggle, and very likely, with the most guileless expression, address, if they dare, insulting questions to the object of their derision.

What absorbs their small minds is a totally unsympathetic social curiosity — an intense, but for all the giggling *not* a humorous, social fascination.

But in the case of little boys it is entirely different. They are far too lost in their game, in their hunt after birds' eggs, in their tree-climbing, in their cat-baiting, in their lively conspiracies among themselves, in their pursuit of minnows and sticklebacks, in their pretence of being bandits or 'Indians' — in a word, they are too self-centred and egoistic, to concern themselves seriously with the apparition of a funny old man or a funny old woman.

The only way in which these poor scarecrows can defend themselves from the heartless curiosity of little girls is to carry the war into the enemies' camp and begin questioning the liveliest among their tormentors upon the defects of *their* attire; whereas the feeblest attempt to enter into the egoistic preoccupation of a boy will at once win favour and attention.

Summing up, therefore, the whole problem of old age in its relation to others, what emerges is the necessity *to get ourselves accepted as what we are*, mysterious and isolated entities, left stranded by life's on-rushing stream, no longer capable of fending for ourselves and outwardly grotesque in our dependence; but in possession all the same, like brine-crusted broken shells, picked up along the windrow between land and sea, of miraculous revelations of colour. Something beyond colour! Visions they are of that magic mother-of-pearl to which nothing but the silt and sediment of a long life, drawn from the washing of many tides, can give the true fairy-tale gleam.

An old man or an old woman should be, and can be, a treasure-trove of inexhaustible interest to a young discoverer. but as with all wild creatures it is best not to lift a hand or move an eyelid till our own kindred self-absorption has lured our small fellow-egoist to our side.

## OLD AGE AND LITERATURE

IN considering this particular aspect of the life of the old, there are two quite different ways of going to work. We may on the one hand discuss such general questions as what type of book is most often found in the hand of old people and whether the most frequent selection made by old women is the same as that made by old men; or on the other hand we can devote ourselves to the problem as to the kind of reading from which in our opinion elderly people can draw the best stimulus and the most comfort.

One of the last things an old person feels tempted to do or feels that it is incumbent upon him to do is to offer cultural advice to other old people! If he holds strong opinions, as many of us elderly people do, about the education and moral influence of one kind of book, or about the deteriorating and disintegrating effect of another, he feels as a rule that the appropriate and dedicated recipients of such opinions are the intelligent young.

But the majority of us are apt to find that the intelligent young, whatever their need of advice may be, are extremely adverse to taking it; and of all possible advice the kind to which they are most adverse is the advice of the old.

We are thus driven back once again upon the old adage that example is better than precept. What does affect the youthful mind in all these wider and deeper questions of culture is not our *discourse* on what we're studying but the fact that we are so infatuated with it.

I know I must be right in this because some of the vividest memories of my own youth bear it out. What has the most rousing and startling effect upon us are the occasions when we catch our teachers off-guard and quite unconscious of the feelings they're betraying.

For instance, I can remember well how Mr. Wildman, one of the most passionate scholars at Sherborne School and a man who was humorously free from every sort of pretence, when we were repeating in turn our

allotted portion of Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality', and came to the lines:

Hence in a season of calm weather  
 Though inland far we be,  
 Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea  
 Which brought us hither,  
 Can in a moment travel thither,  
 And see the Children sport upon the shore,  
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore' —

this humorous and hot-tempered gentleman, whose Rabelaisian comments upon the classics were the mischievous delight of our souls, suddenly rapped out a regular quarter-deck oath to the effect that if *this* wasn't great poetry he'd like to know what was!

I can recollect another instance of the same sort of thing in connection with the same impassioned scholar. This happened in his own House, of which I was anything but a distinguished member, and happened when for some gross and palpable fault I had to present myself before him in his private dining-room after his private dinner.

I found him with a Greek Grammar in his hand chuckling to himself after his unequalled manner; and what must he do, in one of those eccentric impulses which used to scare us while they endeared him to us, but burst out, totally forgetting the purpose of my visit, into a positively rapturous disquisition on some exquisitely nice point of Greek Syntax! What it was I have forgotten; and I am sure I didn't comprehend a word of what he said; but the great point was that *it was said to himself* rather than to me; and the effect of it was to make me feel that a Greek Grammar was a veritable *windrow*, between sandy shore and infinite sea, strewn with magical treasures-trove, coral and starfish and every sort of mother-of-pearl shell!

What richly arrests and irresistibly fascinates a young person in an old person is a peep into a treasure-cave of mystery.

Now though it is true enough that old people are anything but caves of wisdom; still, after all, they *have* bustled about a little in their day, and though now they lie derelict on the shore of time, a young explorer has only to place them, like a wisp of dried-up seaweed, in any sort of rock-pool to see wondrous colours, fairy gleams, incredible lustres,



tide-borne from the reefs and shoals of the Isles of the Hesperides. come to light!

And these windrow-wonders that crack and break under a careless tread, have reached their banked-up resting place on the shore of an old person's mind not merely from external events.

It is from the halcyon seas of *books* that they have drifted hither, books that have deepened these old folks' minds, dazzled their senses, refined their feelings, and discovered to themselves their essential souls.

The books of an aged person's present moment are not necessarily the books of his past, either the past of his youthful plunderings or of his mature satisfaction. They are often those deep, simple, de-moded, undated, long-winded, inartistic, formless books, wherein humanity has stored up that humorous and poetic wisdom which is the *second thought of the generations* and which seem — though we are ashamed to say so — dull, long-winded unexciting; completely lacking in all those topical shocks, controversial whirlpools, erotic thrills, strip-teasing tensions, oases of paradisiac heresy, craters of seismic re-valuation, and dragon's teeth of extravagant blasphemy, in which philosophers must abound to-day if they wish to sell or excel.

It would be foolish, of course, to deny the dominant part played by personal taste in elderly people's choice of books; but it must be confessed that there *does* enter into it in many cases a touch of — what shall I say? — classical moralizing on their particular case. I refer to the natural feeling that it were much more foolish to spend the few and feeble years remaining to them over what Lamb calls 'biblia a-biblia', 'books that are no books', than to lose the reputation of being a 'lively old sport' by our intellectual scrupulosity. What old age above all needs it seems to me are as many vistas for brooding and pondering and for what Longfellow calls 'long, long thoughts' as it can possibly get.

Most people who know themselves at all, whether young or old, will agree, I think, that our most enjoyable moments come to us unexpectedly and, as it were, *sideways*.

Now there are certain authors the most interesting portion of whose work concerns itself directly with those ruminative moments, when the soul, so to speak, chews the cud of former fleeting sensations. Proust's work is one case in point and other aspects of these infinitely desirable moments make up the deepest revelations of Wordsworth's poetry.

Dorothy M. Richardson in her book entitled *Pilgrimage*, deals with this same illusive stuff of the memory. But none of these exhausts this oceanic field of research or indeed fathoms the secrets of one single day's voyage-length of its vast mystery.

One condition, as far as my own experience goes, seems to me indispensable for the appearance of these startling and magically satisfying moments, and that is an element of the *mechanical*. By this I mean some intermittent ease to the restless mind by a slight physical movement.

Now this can be as gentle and unfatiguing as you please, as long as it is fairly often repeated. It must be a natural movement and it must not last too long; or, instead of what we desire to enjoy, the vulture-worries of our daily troubles will begin to scent their prey!

Now it is clear that in the perusal of an exciting story, of whose plot and conclusion we are totally ignorant, the mind is fully occupied. It is I fancy very rare—indeed almost impossible—for these paradisiac moments of purged memory to interrupt the reading of a 'detective' or 'mystery' story.

This complete absorption in the excitement of the tale itself is, of course, the very thing that both middle-aged professional men and the rank and file of over-worked women naturally and most legitimately crave.

But old age wants something quite different from this. It wants to 'loaf and invite its soul'; it wants to expatiate and brood and ponder, it wants to indulge in happy wandering thoughts.

It reads with its philosophy; it reads with its aesthetic reactions; it reads with the obscure, amorphous, fluctuating weight of its whole complicated experience; it reads with its vegetative 'stupid being', with its animal passivity, with the loneliness of its egoism, with the impersonal humility of its detached curiosity.

It reads with a world-revolving searchlight from the whole circumference of the soul's orbicular aura. Above all it craves and demands in its reading a very special and peculiar sensation—the *sensation of life's continuity*.

Just as the boy in Longfellow's poem is happiest in his 'long, long thoughts', so old age, looking back down the years, doesn't want to stop with the fading of its own memories, it instinctively wishes to draw upon the memories of its fathers before it, upon the memories of the old men of old time!

The books that will suit its purpose best, therefore, are the very books that it is impossible to read quickly or to skim. They are the books that are the most thickly charged with the overtones and undertones of the whole weight of the river of life as it flows between the twilight of the populous past and the twilight of the unpopulated future.

Such books will hardly ever be of the kinds that bewitch, obsess, absorb and electrify. Away with your spell-binding intoxicants, offering no difficulties to be leisurely overcome, no blank spaces of a restorative dullness, no pleasant easily-followed academic plagiarisms, no martistic human platitudes, no old-world ramblings, no monotonous grassy vistas, no bare sand-dunes between land and sea, no naked promontories from which to survey the tedious march of the Constellations! Away with your fever-heating, nerve-tickling, hair-raising books, with no repetitions, no lapses, no digressions, no long-winded excursions, no meticulous descriptions, no horizons of undramatic uniformity!

The books in brief that best suit old age are, to put it plainly, those unexciting, untopical, long-winded works that we have come to call *the Classics*. That the Classics are not easy reading, that the Classics are sometimes obscure, very often dull, invariably attended by such mechanical labours as 'looking up' words in dictionaries and lexicons, is, where old age is concerned, all to the good.

It is these very interruptions to rapid perusal that give the mind its chance to *expatiate on its own*, give it in fact golden opportunities for those particular memories of past sensations which if they are not 'intimations' of immortality are certainly the divinest moments of our mortality.

Aye! as we pause in our reading of the Classics, with all our manifold infirmities and doddering weaknesses thick upon us, we catch the murmur of the eternal ocean of unconquerable life! It is as if the bones of our half-dead skulls could feel the silver-darting fins of the Fish of Life as it swims through the holes 'that were our eyes'. It is as if our death's heads were enticing immortal butterflies.

And so indeed they are. For these are verily the strange Platonic visitations of a reality beyond reality and even if they don't justify us in declaring that 'good hope lies at the bottom' they do justify us in declaring that the most intense thrill of happiness possible to man is the thrill we get from these frail vignettes of memory.

On my soul if I were an intelligent young man or young woman and were always finding my grandmother or grandfather reading detective stories with such spell-bound interest that Nature and Philosophy and Psychology and History became dull in comparison, I should feel, and not without cause, that the good gammer or gaffer was already in a state of dotage.

It is hard to imagine a human being who has spent three score years and ten in this magical and farcical world who wouldn't be ashamed to the very heart to be forever reading books as an addict uses drugs, solely to dull the pain of thought.

But what type of work *are* we justified in regarding as the ideal reading for old age? Well, for an old woman I would be tempted to answer: any book, whether fiction or non-fiction, that offered a lively and vivid picture of some particular *social 'milieu'*.

Women are a great deal more involved and interested than men in the spectacle of social life; and there is also the probability that any ordinarily educated woman is less likely to have had a smattering of the Classics than any fairly well educated old man.

She will have so many cultural advantages over such an old man that it is fair enough that he should at least remember his 'small' Greek letters, even if he has forgotten the lesser-used 'capitals'.

In her feeling for books she will be far more catholic and comprehensive than he is and far less pedantic.

After fiction, I am inclined to think that realistic and exciting lives of great social figures will be her favourite reading. There are few women who are not instinctive actresses and fewer still whose especial feminine egoism doesn't find curious satisfaction, a more than aesthetic sympathy — something that even might be called *empathy* — in identifying itself with the career of any striking specimen of womanhood or girlhood that may have been singled out by fate or chance to arrive at some particular eminence.

An old woman is naturally, in the nature of the case, handicapped, hindered and balked in the pursuit of what she has, as a woman, enjoyed all her days. I refer to her passion of curiosity with regard to new and unaccustomed social surroundings. These she loves to embrace in their minutest details and in their most imponderable atmospheric conditions.

Any book therefore, whether written well or ill, artistically or clum-

sily, that fulfils the purpose of presenting to her vision a new *milieu* of social conditions, conditions in any class to which she is unaccustomed, in any country or any age unfamiliar to her. supplies her whole being, her whole feminine *élan de la vie*, with a delicious vicarious satisfaction

From the confinement of her bed-chamber, from the prison of her four walls, she can triumphantly escape, in the pages of such a book, as if upon a magic carpet, into a rich new world of people and things among which she can move and observe and listen and feel; comparing one aspect of it with another, and one atmospheric impression of it with another.

This comparison of one set of imponderable essences with another set of imponderable essences is a woman's supreme contribution to what might be termed the *psychic aesthetics* of life; and she has always at her finger-tips in dealing with what is strange and new to her all the contrasting fields of social relations with which she is already familiar

A book of Memoirs, a book of Travel, a Biographical Sketch, a convincing and realistic work of Fiction. any of these will serve; and what an intelligent old woman craves is a pretty large variety of these, so that she can move quickly and with a renewed vicarious relish from one world of social experience to another

The last thing she wants to do is to bank up and narrow down and canalize and specialize her activity. She wants ever and always to expand her sphere. She wants to drain more and more deeply the dangerous and intoxicating cup of life's shameless and scandalous and indecent reality.

Yes, life, and only life, is what a woman in her old age is after; and she is after it far more boldly and searchingly than in her shy and self-conscious and romantic girlhood; life in any form is what she craves as long as it is real, palpable, *social*, and made of flesh and blood.

And something follows inevitably and irresistibly from this: namely the fact that what the woman demands — Lamb speaks beautifully of this when he compares his sister's choice of books with his own — is Nature; Nature in all her confused and chaotic *ensemble*. Thus what a woman wants from books is a certain realizable, though it may be a quite arbitrary and imaginary, *contemporaneity*

In other words though she may be reading of the lover of Lord Byron or of the intrigues at the Court of Catharine of Russia, or of the adventures of an American Ambassadors among the Nazis, or of a mystical group of

travellers in Tibet, the details that arrest her attention take upon them, as she moves among them, the vividness of things enjoyed and suffered *here and now*.

Shaw's *Pygmalion* is only an extreme caricature of the amazing power all women possess of *alien-shifting* and of gliding intact from social circle to social circle. Nothing could be more different from this than what an old man requires from the books he reads.

What he wants is, of course, Life too; but it is Life *at a certain distance*, Life winnowed, sifted, selected, refined upon. Life in a Mirror, Life as it tickles the virtuoso-palate — and this applies to many an old fellow who wouldn't know the meaning of one of these long words, though they describe exactly what he is in essence — of an erudite, aesthetic, ethnological, chronological, philological, paleographical, philosophical epicure.

It might even be said that what an old man wants is not Life at all, but *an escape from Life into Himself*. Schopenhauer maintained that the 'Nirvana' of the all-devouring self — that is to say its escape from the terrible urge of the Will to Live — is reached in childhood and old age by means of 'the outward eye', in other words by forgetting ourselves and losing ourselves in our absorbed interest in outward things.

In one important sense this is perfectly true, but in the case of women it must be qualified by a certain peculiar element that enters into their zest for new life-circles and new concatenations of the life-drama. This element might be described as a 'diffused maternal possessiveness', save that its kind of possessiveness is the projection of a very ubiquitous and a very evasive self.

There is, however, much less social ubiquity in the possessive element of an old man's 'outward eye'. His interests may be just sufficiently outward to escape the treacherous urge of 'the Will to Live'; but they are narrowed down to 'minute particulars'. They do not include those wider atmospheric essences in which women lose themselves to find themselves. When old men escape the 'Will to Live' in objective interests, the field of their concern is drastically directed towards a particular groove or furrow.

What old men want to do is to make deeper and ever deeper some *specialized channel of continuity* for the river of their conscious life. And this channel will be all the better adapted to their purpose the more rocky and resistant is the soil in which they dig.

The last thing they want is a soft and sandy bed for the stream they are engaged in carrying forward. They instinctively feel that such a bed, with its silt and shallows and sand-banks, might suck down and swallow up the water they are so carefully guiding.

And yet the resistance of the substance through which the channel passes must not be too extreme. An old man's mental strength, like his physical strength, is by no means inexhaustible; and the whole trend of his labour would come to nothing if his energy wilted.

Well! We ask once more what kind of book best supplies this desirable element, this element of difficulty, and yet of difficulty that yields to industry and routine?

The answer can be given in a word. What the old man requires is simply what has come by general consent to be called a *Classic*. Well then, let us consider in the light of our argument one or two of these 'classics'. Montaigne's *Essays* in Cotton's translation, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* in Carlyle's, or Rabelais, in the famous Urquhart version, undoubtedly offer, even their Anglicized form, the 'difficulty' we require.

But what is called a *dead language* can obviously serve our turn better still. I am all in favour of my old gentlemen being allowed to use at his present age what he was forbidden to use in his boyhood, namely a *literal translation*, but I am equally certain that he will not get the subtler and rarer advantages of his leisure until he *habitually* turns the pages of that unique epitome of human civilization, Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon!

Most old men are — and according to my present doctrine have a perfect right to be — what used to be called 'selfish'. Now this 'selfishness' of old age is precisely the attribute which they share with those extremely young children whose conscience has not yet been, as we say of animals, *broken-in* to its human responsibility; and it is quite a different sort of thing from the selfishness of young men and of middle-aged men.

In these latter cases there is a violent conflict *within the conscience itself* between the passionate impulse to strike out for 'Number One', an impulse often thoroughly justified, and some equally passionate imperative against striking out. But in old age there is no such conflict. The 'selfishness' of an old man is no longer a struggle between two potent and overruling impulses. It is a cult, a method of life, a system of aesthetic development, in a word a pragmatic philosophy.

Youth and middle-age are still contending in the world's great arena, each of them using sometimes one weapon and sometimes another. Youth and middle-age are involved in the active stream of history-making. Their life-canoes are always lurching and pitching and rocking in the criss-cross currents and wind-blown estuaries of evolution itself. They have no detachment from the Will-to-Live, no escape from the struggle for existence. Their lives are aggravated by sex and complicated by offspring. The lure of riches and power and fame seduces them in one direction while the lure of an heroic and spectacular sacrifice of these things attracts them in another.

But old men are no longer in the arena. They but usurp their life; and unless they have the wisdom of Nestor or the white magic of Melchizedek they are a burden on the community and a care to their relatives.

Yes, the truth is that unless old men possess some deep interior life of their own they are almost bound to hang like millstones round the necks of their children and their children's children. Nor is it to be supposed, though he possesses all the natural vanity in the world, that this state of things can be completely concealed from an old man. He is really alone in an unsympathetic world and in his heart he knows that he is. He knows that in spite of all the care that surrounds him his death will be a relief if not an unspeakable comfort to his survivors.

How then can we old men acquire deep and secret life of our own? Well! Let us have the courage of our bookishness for once and boldly say: 'By the magic of certain books!' And what are these books? They are those that the human race itself has handed down to us for this very identical purpose! There are the volumes to the composition of which the two supreme qualities of all great literature have contributed: namely the old wives' wisdom of the author's particular race expressed in poem and proverb, and the uncommunicable mystery of personal style in which is revealed the god-devil within the man himself.

At this point, however, emerges a tremendous problem; the problem of the difficulty of the 'foreign' language. Luckily we Britishers are already in possession of several world-famous Classics that for us need no translation. Such are the Plays of Shakespeare. Such is Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Such are the Poems of Milton and the Works of Sir Thomas Browne. Such is Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and the Essays of



Lamb and the Poems of Keats. Such are the novels of Scott, Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens

It often happens, however, that the less classical a writer is the more he tends to eke out his weakness by a richly idiosyncratic or complicated style. This stylistic quality allures us when we are young, and we all have had in early days the somewhat humiliating experience of finding that on our first acquaintance with the greater Classics these famous works present themselves to our restless intelligence as *simply dull*. And indeed in contacts with our religious, erotic and political passions they *are* dull. This is a fact that cannot be gainsaid. Their unqualified fluidity, transparency and objectivity, not to speak of their aesthetic humility and impersonality, soft-pedal to such a tune those exciting adjuncts of our combative personalities, passion and self-pity, that the atmosphere is denuded of the electricity to which we are accustomed.

Their shameless earthiness, too, and their incorrigible humour, together with their scandalously secular and impartial attitude towards every sort of condition of God, demigod or super-god, of necessity confines their strongest appeal not only to the extremely young and to the 'well-stricken in years', but to those who for any other reason have come to be detached from the hotter fevers of sex, race, and religion.

The important thing is to be absolutely *honest with ourselves* as to the nature of our response to the classics. Children as a rule can't help being honest in this sense; while old people — at least old men — have as a rule been driven by the sheer pressure of the struggle for existence to free their minds from the worst extravagancies of cultural affectation.

At the same time, as the wise sophist said, man remains 'the measure of all things' and it is stupid not to be interested in the verdict of the human race upon literature, as that verdict is sifted out during the long centuries.

It cannot, however, be denied that there is a loss as well as a gain in any exclusive devotion to these masterpieces of the human race. But this is a loss more prominent in youth and middle-age than in old age; and to discover what it is we have only to question the many readers of books who can no more enjoy a classic of this sort than they can enjoy Greek.

It is the loss of the immediate stimulus of topical interest. The supreme classics of humanity represent the wisdom of the ancient Earth herself, as contrasted with the mercurial passions of the passing moment; and

since they represent the eternally recurrent emotions of humanity their tone tends to be simple and deep rather than involved and startling; and it is therefore natural enough that to a reader who is 'out', as we say, to get a thrilling sensation they prove disappointing. Their emotional subject-matter is *old too*, as well as eternally buoyant and fresh, and on both these counts they make a special appeal to old age.

It is here too that early education plays such a dominant part, giving those who have had the great luck to be *forced to acquire a smattering* of Greek and Latin an incalculable and most unfair advantage. Merely to have acquired the trick of converting the Greek letters into some sort of corresponding English sounds — which the poorest of linguists can learn to do — is an unbelievable 'open sesame' to an inexhaustible treasure-house of poetry and philosophy.

I do not mean that a dignified, simple prose translation of either *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, and to my mind by far the best of all is the American one in the 'Loeb Classics', doesn't give you the *substance* of the Homeric Poems.

It does do this; and does it well. What I mean is it doesn't, and in the nature of the case cannot, give you the *feeling of the style*.

Now I have already, I hope, converted my reader to the importance of some, though not too difficult, *obstacles* in the path of an old man 'on literary pleasure bent'.

The sort of obstacle I have in mind would simply imply some mechanical effort or physical movement which in the course of our reading would tempt the mind and provoke the imagination to dilate at random and in errant fashion over what it is about. And no better intermission, no better series of intermissions, could possibly be found than the necessity of 'looking up' words in a dictionary, preferably in a big dictionary, like Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon.

Grammar and Syntax can be permitted to recede to a secondary place in this case, since as a rule the more bewildering changes in moods and tenses are allowed for in a good lexicon.

The mere hunt for a particular word in this unequalled treasure-house is bound to result in various side-trackings of the wayfaring mind, which are *in themselves* often more suggestive and more illuminating than the discovery of the particular meaning we are after. The value of either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* in the final education of any human soul is increased

rather than diminished if this particular Disciple of Life is the reverse of a trained scholar.

We are forced to go slow. And slow going when we tread a path like this — where every step opens up some new imaginative vista — is as good, if not better, than to be carried on the back of Pegasus.

But whether rough or smooth, easy or retarded, any journey in company with the oldest as well as the greatest, of the world's poets is bound to throw the simplest detail of our daily life into a fresh and redeeming perspective. Once fairly launched on the Homeric tide all manner of unexpected illuminations, affecting profoundly our secretest attitude to life, flash upon our course.

And it seems to me that among such illuminations, as the number of the days behind us increase, and of those before us lessen, the most formidable and startling is the very one upon which we can fall back with the deepest security.

Curiously enough this essential 'secret' of Homer — to use Matthew Arnold's suggestive word in a different connection — seems to be exactly the mental gesture with which the youngest of our great English poets, I mean John Keats, fortified his *amor fati*, his exultant acceptance of things. 'When I hear', he writes in one of his letters — I paraphrase his words — 'of any friend of mine crushingly hit by some devilish concatenation of evil chances, I say to myself: "Well! Mr. So and So has now his grand chance of testing the resources of his spirit."'

Be it noted that Keats doesn't say: 'of his faith in God', nor does he say 'of submitting to what Science teaches'. The implication is that Mr. So-and-So's lonely and solitary soul, when confronted by an evil chance in a chaos of conflicting forces, has nothing it can fall back upon save that mysterious creator, able to create anything out of nothing, namely his own deep soul.

Homer is not merely the greatest poet of the human race; he is also, though to some minds this will sound a crazy paradox, its wisest philosopher. The abiding atmosphere of the Homeric Poems, the element in them that quickens and heightens and colours the Homeric philosophy, the element in them which is the real essence of the Homeric philosophy, is, like all living principles, easier to feel and to act upon than to describe in words. I suppose the only word that comes near it is the simple old-fashioned word 'poetic'.

The Homeric attitude to life is certainly too vital and too organic to lend itself to scientific analysis or logical summary. Religion enters into it; Morality enters into it; and the whole thing is rounded off by a Philosophy which is far deeper and subtler than appears on the surface. The instinct of worship and the categorical imperative of conscience are in Homer fused together by poetry; and so become more malleable and flexible and brought into closer relation with the fluidity of actual life than when they dominate the field in isolation from each other.

The Homeric philosophy is in fact *the philosophy of old experience*. This is one of the reasons why it is naturally more adapted to old age than any other.

The real truth about it seems to be that the Homeric attitude to life is the one to which the generations of mankind naturally revert when the Messiahs and the Prophets and the Politicians and the Priests and the Law-givers and the revolutionary and reactionary Dictators let them alone to follow their own choice. Yes, to this they return after every deviation and every compulsion, like water seeking its level!

And although the Homeric temper is magical and superstitious it rejects samtiness; nor has its morale any of the imaginative vibrant pity which was brought into the world by the Christian Religion.

At the same time nobody subjected to its constant influence could lightly indulge in brutality, vulgarity, or hopeless cynicism. But I would like to be more definite still with regard to the Philosophy of Homer; for what we have here is, it seems to me, nothing more or less than that actual *Pluralism* advocated so eloquently and philosophically by William James in defiance of rational logic, and embodied so poetically by Walt Whitman, the Pluralistic concept of reality which might indeed be regarded as *the American Philosophy par excellence*.

The assumption at the back of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* seems to be that our present ill-omened Dimension of Life floats like a blood-stained bubble on the surface of an unfathomable Multiverse of Mysteries.

It is in Homer's world in fact, not in the world of Hegel or of Herbert Spencer that we ordinary men live. Yes, our world is a world of 'the Many' rather than of 'the One'. In a most literal sense it is a polytheistic world of many gods. It is a world *not* under fate alone, *nor* under providence alone; but, as we realize more and more vividly as we grow older, under many conflicting Forces, some of them divine and some of

them diabolic and some of them without any purpose or character or meaning or consciousness at all!

It is a world ruled over by Chance and Destiny and Necessity and Nemesis and the Erinyes; by gods many and demigods many; by super-human heroes and sub-human monsters. We needn't be as old as Nestor to recognize that the philosophy of Homer is the philosophy of a wise old man. At any rate it certainly is superior not only to Stoicism and Epicureanism but to the Systems of Plato and Aristotle.

As he sat at the banquet in the Palace of Alcinous listening to Demodocus the Bard whose song and whose harp melted his soul in sobs, the crafty hero of the *Odyssey* declares before them all that even for him the sacker of Troy, even for him the winner of the armour of Achilles, even for him the friend of Pallas Athene, it is 'the Song made for those yet to be born' and born out of the tragic and heroic happenings of the past, the Song listened to in the shadowy hall, when the soul is satisfied with meat and the winecup is filled and the fire burns on the hearth, that remains the sweetest thing in the whole world.

Alternate moods of defiance of Chance and resignation to Fate; alternate moods of a grim wrestling with Necessity and a patient reverence for the Erinyes seem indeed as we give ourselves up to this tremendous music better adapted to our present dimension of the multiverse than the softer, tenderer, more sensitized, more elaborate emotions that stir in adequate response to the rounded-off systems of modern metaphysic.

We are all confronted in our abysmal loneliness by various 'seas of troubles'; and, 'taking arms' against these, all we can depend on is our own fighting spirit. The ignorant impetuosity of youth loves to reduce all mysteries to *one mystery*; the short-sighted shrewdness of middle-age wants to analyse every atom of this same *one mystery*; while all the while the terrible common sense of old age sees them both as subjected to a thousand multifarious influences at once baleful and beneficent.

The adamant Barrier of Time and Space to which all living souls among us to-day are subject, separating completely this present Dimension from all others — lo! Homer has lifted it and the resultant world is nothing less than the unfathomable Multiverse itself, full of unpredictable chances and accidents and surprises, full of formidable superhuman presences, some of them 'on our side', some hostile to us, but none without their own peculiar influence on the current of our destiny.

Now the combined effect of all these contradictory forces in Homer is to throw each particular man and woman back upon their underlying selves, back upon their detached, observant, watchful, undistracted, unpropitiated inmost souls, those conscious, shapeless, possibly immortal identities, for whose particular experience, it would almost seem, the whole gamut of our cosmogonic diversity-in-duality and duality-in-diversity has been conjured up!

Yes, the general drift of all these contradictory influences, swirling up so chaotically about our path, is to force us into a position of defensive loneliness, a loneliness which at bottom is absolute, a loneliness that in spite of all the friendly presences that surround us, and in spite of all our own resilience out of misfortune, can only be described as Tragic.

But it is just this pluralistic and multifarious view of things, lending itself at once to a proud emphasis upon the individual and a tragic heightening of his loneliness, that renders Homer the best author in the world for the support and inspiration of old age.

The difficulty is the language; and to many of us this is an insuperable barrier. But, as I have hinted, if only we can get as far as recognizing and pronouncing — in some fashion or other! — the Greek letters, why, then, armed with almost any ordinary prose-translation — preferably neither a 'beautifully-written' one, nor a slangy 'naturalistic' one — we can push off our boat on the immemorial classic river that leads to the richest happiness — a book-worm *holding* the rod this time, and not on the hook! — a man can ever know within four walls!

Well, so much for our first choice in literature for old age! And continuing to speak as an old man myself rather than as an old woman — though few old men, I fancy, could boast a larger ingredient of the old woman in their psychic make-up than I — I would myself suggest a leisurely and protracted perusal of the *Gargantua and Pantagruel* of Rabelais.

Here an old man will find just that particular quality, so lacking in Homer and yet so essential to any full and rich acceptance of life in our Present Dimension, that might be called a *planetary unfastidiousness*.

From Homer we learn to live stoically and resolutely in the eternal *Continuity* — poetically selected from the rubble and flotsam — of all the symbolic moments in the lives of the generations. In Rabelais we warm our old bones at the eternally rekindled central fire of life itself. In

Homer we wander for ever round the magical circumference of human experience, rejecting much, selecting much, eulogizing much, but always retaining a calm spirit and a crafty head, as is proper for those who in their critical moments call upon Pallas Athene!

As subjects of the great king Gargantua however, the flag of our cultural mandate is hoisted at the opposite pole, or at no pole at all.

At the Equator of our Tellurian Circle it is hoisted: for under the power of the divine drug called *Pantagruelion* we learn how to take 'the Kingdom of the Multiverse' by storm; neither selecting anything in particular nor rejecting anything in particular, but squeezing the Pomegranates of Divine Ecstasy even as the cattle of the field chew their cud of common grass!

An old man who reads Rabelais with inexhaustible attention, planetary sentence by planetary sentence, is likely enough, without articulate awareness as to how the process has worked upon him, to have acquired as many tricks to defeat the devils of our misery as Panurge carried about with him to harass the unfortunate 'Watch' in the Streets of Paris! Of course in these subtle psychic-sensuous matters we have got to aim at a certain frank and free *Pelagianism*; at any rate at something which shall be the extreme opposite of wicked, despair-inducing Calvinism.

We must in fact believe that our human intelligence and will-power play the dominant part in our choice of books. But alas! I'm afraid that in this delicately-adjusted matter our will is anything but absolutely free!

We are not predestined *in all*; but we probably are predestined in three-quarters or four-fifths of our being. What predestines us, however, is not that appalling God-Devil, for believing in whom with such devoted ferocity the Church — making her greatest theological mistake — canonized Augustine, but simply our particular human character.

Heredity and Environment make up no doubt, in our modern Holy Office under Monseigneur Pasteur and Cardinal Pavlov, a pretty fair substitute for the old orthodoxy; but I gather that even the scientific determinism of these new Inquisitors doesn't cover quite the whole field. *Something* is left over for which neither the old or the new Dogmatism can account. A man is more than a walking amalgam of his parents and his school.

The logical oriental myth of pre- and re-incarnation — even though it

were without a grain of truth — would at least be a witness to a deep instinct in us that protests against both the Calvinistic and the Scientific dogma of inexorable Determinism.

And it is for the sake of this precious margin of our being where within the given limits we *are* privileged to assert ourselves, that this matter of the choice of books — especially in old age when we have learnt by bitter experience just how far we *can* tamper with our inherited disposition — is so peculiarly important.

Of the books that have been accepted by the human race as 'classics' there may be said to be two main types: those we enjoy for their *style* and those we enjoy for their effect upon our secret culture and our individual enjoyment of life.

The two kinds frequently overlap; and it often happens that in a writer's style there are overtones and undertones that convey all manner of magical intimations for the alert senses. But though the great stylists can frequently serve us in enlarging the circle of our aesthetic appreciation, where they fail us — though there are exceptions like Walter Pater — is in the extremely important matter of our reaction to Life in General, the problem in fact of how we are to feel with that portion of our being which is completely indifferent to form and fashion and concerned only with our vital planetary sensations.

I want to avoid all freakish personal prejudice in this chapter; but it is hard, I think, for any real student not to be prejudiced against wealthy bibliophiles and collectors of rare editions! Do not such persons strike one as ignoble compared with the collectors of fossils, and as frivolous compared with the virtuosos in old china? And do not all these pretentious pets in book-covers with their smug, uncut pages and their immaculate arts and crafts virginity, fill all honest bookworms with a peculiar and special distaste?

The real book-lover, if I may say so without offence, is like an unashamed whoremonger where his grand passion is concerned, in that he prefers books that have acquired a certain rich and mellow familiarity from the mere fact of having been so often embraced!

The Italian philosopher Croce hazards the paradox that the long generations of devoted readers play an organic role in the creation of the magic that enthral them; and although this may be carrying things rather far, it is surely not too much to say that any true classic that has been read



again and again century after century by thousands of readers does come at last to resemble some immemorial religious Liturgy that everybody knows by heart and whose every syllable is charged with something beyond and above its plain and obvious significance

Anyone familiar with the Collects of the English Prayer-book who chanced to stumble unexpectedly upon words like these: 'O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed; Give unto thy servant that peace which the world cannot give; that both our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments. and also that by thee we being defended from the fear of our enemies may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour' — or upon words like these: 'Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ' — or like these: 'Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same —' or like these: 'Grant we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord —' anyone I say, who chanced to stumble unexpectedly upon such words could hardly fail to experience, quite beyond the obvious and plain meaning of the words, something of the gathered-up burden, solemn and tragic, but surely 'not harsh nor grating, though of ample power to chasten and subdue', of those heightened moments of Birth and Death, those Separations and Reconciliations, those long Farewells, and miraculous Recoveries, that are, according to Homer, the best excuse the gods can offer for the way things are upon the earth; since at least they are sufficiently beautiful and mysterious to 'make a song for the generations to come'.

But at this point a curious and rather piquant question arises — is it possible to convert the type of person who loves reading exciting stories and indeed is what might be called a passionate reader, into a thorough-paced, or perhaps I ought to say a thorough-mandibled *bookworm*?

I am inclined myself to doubt it — though I confess I do know cases where something very like it has happened. But I suspect there must have been a true bookworm-bacillus — even if not advanced as far as the

embryo-stage -- latent in the temperament of these 'fiction-fiends' that an accidental allusion in one of their 'best-sellers' -- perhaps a description of some maniacal old scholar -- had caused to germinate.

Certainly no old man can be absolutely sure he lacks in his constitution the embryo of this divine grub until he has made a few resolute and industrious experiments. And by God! he will be a hundred-fold rewarded if he *does* discover it.

Now it must be remembered that the fountain of good fiction, lively, topical, and contemporary, is not inexhaustible. Nor have we the right to assume that our aged fiction-lover can afford to subscribe to a good library, far less to purchase his precious drug. No, the only way, and I cannot emphasize this enough, to reach the inmost marrow-bone of the pleasure of reading is the 'go slow' with a Classic that itself refuses to be rushed.

The slower you go and more you get; and in this 'more' is implied not only profit to soul and senses but intense and exquisite enjoyment. Drug-addicts must, of course, have their drugs, drunkards their drink, and fiction-fiends their hair-raising conundrums. Heaven forbid I should disparage with persecuting Pauline zeal the celestial escape from 'the whips and scorns of time' that these blessed nepenthes offer; but you would have to be far more paradoxical than Henry James's weird character in 'the Tragic Muse', Mr. Gabriel Nash, to uphold the thesis that 'other things being equal' the escape from the pricks of life offered by a detective-story has any advantage over the escape offered by a Classic 'that refuses to be rushed'.

I am inclined to think that in this gallant attempt to discover whether or no you are a bookworm in embryo or not more help is to be afforded from any regular *stylist* like Sir Thomas Browne or Charles Lamb or Cowper in his Letters, or De Quincy in his 'Opium-Eater', than from the prophetic and philosophic writers who draw their inspiration more directly from the fountain source.

It is perfectly true that from reading Goethe or Emerson or Whitman or Balzac or Dostoevsky or Gogol or Nietzsche a person can derive an enraptured and tippy sense of having their passions purged and their spirit released by an imaginary absorption in certain beautiful and terrible elements of life.

But one thing cannot be claimed on behalf of these great inspirers of

the spirit and that is that they offer much help in developing bookworm grubs into the full-grown creatures. For this purpose it really is essential to read the famous *stylists* of our own mother-tongue, men who are of an extremely different type of intellectual calibre from Goethe or Dostoevsky or Nietzsche or Montaigne, those creators of new ideas and discoverers of new paths. Writers like the ones I have just named are perpetually giving us agitating and illuminating revelations; but they do not set us upon any alluring, comforting, absorbing, liberating, *literary* problems. They obsess us like demons, they redeem us like angels, they dominate us like tyrants. They refuse to fill the one rôle in our old age that we pine to have filled — the rôle of wise and patient and understanding schoolmasters in the difficult and delicate art of words.

Nor can the Great Classics, like Homer and Shakespeare and Rabelais and Cervantes, help us in this. It is the *stylists* we need. It is the *stylists* alone who can rouse in us an interest in words for the sake of words, and in rhythms for the sake of rhythms.

Take for instance Sir Thomas Browne. Sir Thomas's private philosophy must have given a gracious, mellow, and mystery-charged background to many a golden walk along the banks of that pleasant Norwich river when the sun was shining on the lazy barges and red-brown sails; but it must be confessed that when an old man greedily craves, as he craves his loaf of wholemeal bread and his pot of strong tea, the simple taste of a page of Homer or Rabelais or Don Quixote, he can hardly get what he wants from the euphonious and sonorous reverberations of Browne's *Hydriotaphia*, though it is the most richly-cadenced and subtly-harmonized prose in our tongue!

Here are no primeval or elemental abandonments. Here are no pantheistic orgies or mystical fusions. Here are no grammatical reefs and shoals to set our irresponsible thoughts drifting towards the Happy Islands! But aye, what divine harmonies! What ebbings and flowings of planetary assonance! 'Oblivion is not to be hired. The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been, to be found in the register of God, not in the record of man. Twenty-seven names make up the first story before the flood, and the recorded names ever since contain not one living century. The number of the dead long exceedeth all that shall live. The night of time far surpasseth the day, and who knows when was the equinox? Every hour adds to that current arithmetick,

which scarce stands one moment. And since death must be the *Lucina* of life, and even Pagasus could doubt, whether thus to live were to die: since our longest sun sets at right descensions, and makes but winter arches, and therefore it cannot be long before we lie down in darkness and have our light in ashes; since the brother of death daily haunts us with dying mementos, and time that grows old in itself, bids us hope no long duration — diruturnity is a dream and folly of expectation.

‘Darkness and light divide the course of time, and oblivion shares with memory a great part even of our living beings, we slightly remember our felicities, and the smartest strokes of affliction leave but short smart upon us. Sense endureth no extremities, and sorrows destroy us or themselves. To weep into stones are fables. Afflictions induce callosities; miseries are slippery, or fall like snow upon us, which notwithstanding is no unhappy stupidity. . . .

‘A great part of antiquity contented their hopes of subsistency with a transmigration of their souls; a good way to continue their memories, while having the advantage of plural successions, they could not but act something remarkable in such variety of beings, and enjoying the fame of their past selves, make accumulation of glory unto their last durations. Others, rather than be lost in the uncomfortable night of nothing, were content to recede into the common being, and make one particle of the public soul of all things, which was no more than to return into their unknown and divine original again. Egyptian ingenuity was more unsatisfied, contriving their bodies in sweet consistencies, to attend the return of their souls. But all was vanity, feeding the wind, and folly. The Egyptian mummies, which Cambyzes or time hath spared, avarice now consumeth. Mummy is become merchandise, Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsams. . . .

‘But man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave, solemnizing nativities and deaths with equal lustre, nor omitting ceremonies of bravery in the infamy of his nature.

‘Life is a pure flame and we live by an invisible sun within us. A small fire sufficeth for life, great flames seemed too little after death, while men vainly affected precious pyres, and to burn like Sardanapalus; but the wisdom of funeral laws found the folly of prodigal blazes, and reduced undoing fires unto the rule of sober obsequies, wherein few could be so mean as not to provide wood, pitch, a mourner, and an urn.’

Though a devoted admirer of Sir Thomas Browne I impatiently confess that after following for the thousandth time these undulating waves of majestic sound with their tidal over-brummings and guttural withdrawals and their tossings up of sandal-wood flotsam from the death-pyres of half the world I am still of the opinion that the primary appeal of this master-creator of verbal harmonies is rather to the pure æsthetic sense than to that richer synthesis of sensuous, emotional, and mental reaction such as makes us curse God with Æschylus, trust in him with Job or doubt his existence with Shakespeare.

But the point I want to make just here is that an old man who has been a lover of books all his life *already knows our English stylists by heart*. One of Lamb's essays, or a page or two of Burton, or Sterne, or Swift, or Browne, or Jeremy Taylor, or Bunyan, or Jane Austen, or Hazlitt, or Stevenson, would no doubt bring back to him familiar vistas of the peculiar æsthetic or sensuous or moral vision of the writer in question, but what he craves is something more than this, *something more difficult*, something whose very difficulty brings all manner of new, fresh, original, unexpected thoughts; and above all something that will offer the shock of a definite mechanical interruption, like 'looking out words' in a dictionary — over which, as over a rock in mid-stream, the current of his feelings is broken into clouds of memories that the wind may carry far away from the hour, the book, and the place.

All elderly book-lovers, whether they use their own books or borrow from public libraries, are only too familiar with the teasing feeling of *knowing a book too well*.

It is the same with our lyric poets. When you know by heart every one of the half a dozen famous Odes of John Keats what pleasure is there in reading them? There is still pleasure in reciting them to a friend, or even to the four winds when we're alone in the open air; but the urge to read them has gone.

And so we are brought back again once more to what is really the chief burden of my doctrine as far as the reading of the old is concerned, namely the study of a foreign language, preferably a dead one, and the use of a dictionary.

Contrast is the grand cause of human enjoyment; and the simplest contact available to an old man whose kettle is not yet boiling, who has already had his walk abroad, and who is lucky enough to have no visitors,

is the contrast from the 'easy sailing' over a halcyon sea of familiar words to the diving under the humming waters of a dictionary's pages to solve the mystery of words that are weird and strange.

Lucky, yea thrice lucky, is the old man who without being by temperament what we call a scholar can recall enough of his early schooling to be able to use Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon! Nobody could turn the pages for a day of this amazing compilation without becoming aware that in the myriad-mouthed ocean of Greek words he is disporting himself in the 'fons et origo' of Western Civilization.

Yes, this 'looking out' words, if the words are Greek ones, offers a double advantage. For either the agreeable difficulty of this small effort causes our mind to wander away among its own past impressions, when it is likely enough it may encounter some particular recollection, isolated and purged by time, that shall startle us with an indescribable thrill of happiness, or the mere fact of being free to wander through this universal treasure-house may bring us bolt up against some chance-selected word that may in itself prove a veritable postern-gate into the 'Appian Way' of race-memory.

In any case if we are dealing with this particular Lexicon our soul can bathe in the fountains of all the Muses by lingering for an hour in the divine airs that blow upon us through this enchanted gate. On these airs float the essences of the rarest thoughts, of the deepest poetry, of the truest wisdom that Homo Sapiens, latest-born of the salt mud, has so far attained.

Before the Macedonian Phalanx, before the Roman Legions, before the Mediaeval Crusaders, before the turbans and scimitars of Islam, Greek poetry, Greek drama, Greek philosophy, Greek history, Greek psychology had already created for us Westerners the modes of thought, the methods of analysis, the principles of private virtue, the ideals of public democracy, every one of the human values in fact which Europe and America have come to regard along with our Semitic Religion as the most important issues of evolution.

As we turn the pages of this Book of Books, which has come to include the Greek Testament, we recognize that here are enshrined the living elements of the richest and subtlest and loveliest *language* that has ever appeared, or ever will appear, on the face of the earth: a language more malleable and more beautiful to mortal ears, and more adapted to what

sight, touch, taste, smell, along with our ears and brains and intimations of instinct report of this terraqueous world, than any other that Anthropos has invented since he destroyed the Neanderthal giants!

Roman Law, English Poetry, French Criticism, German Philosophy, Italian Art, all had to go to school to *the Logos* in the Greek Lexicon. All our Western 'Ethos' and 'Mores', all our Western *Æsthetics*, all the recurrent spirals of our evolution have advanced and retreated, and advanced and retreated again, within the elemental atmosphere of these oceanic vowels and tellurian consonants.

Any aged book-lover in these days who, without being a scholar, has at least learnt how to pronounce the Greek letters, has every justification for listening with a certain humorous detachment to the eloquence about 'creative work' uttered by so many of his younger friends. And he may feel tempted to inquire whether any of these unique originals have ever paused in their 'creative' work to ponder upon the amount of *receptive* work implied in such an epitome of our Western World's self-consciousness as is contained in the one thousand, six hundred and forty-four pages of Dr Henry Liddell and Dr Robert Scott's Greek Lexicon?

But even if it is too great an effort to rub up a little rusty Greek my present theme can be amply illustrated from the value to us of *any* foreign tongue, and Latin would naturally claim the next place. Latin cannot however — such at least is the experience of one singularly unscholarly but singularly bookish individual — play a tenth of the part played by Greek in supplying the imagination of any of us Westerners with grist for our sensuous and mental mill.

But the note upon which I would like to close this chapter concerns those particular wanderings of thought from the book before us — do we say 'in a brown study' because of the old leather-bound volumes in which we are absorbed? — that bring back the most precious moments of our life.

To launch the mind upon these the mechanical effort of using the dictionary for the words of *any* foreign language, dead or living, is quite sufficient. If old age has discovered anything at all by the mere length of its experience it has surely discovered that no playing with literary appreciations, no analysis of aesthetic effects, no whimsical titillations of our humorous 'funny-bone' can by themselves evoke those divine moments

wherein Mnemosyne, the Mother of the Muses, bestows her beautiful vision. What *she* does, this mysterious Immortal — especially, I like to fancy, when it is a Greek word that opens the 'magic casement' — is to carry us away to some far-off scene, some far-off place where instead of any ordinary reassembling or rearranging of the elements of the occasion, instead of any illuminating or obscuring of what occurred there, we are presented with a winnowed essence of that remembered moment, with something that is more than a mirage though less palpable than a mist, something that is a mental *eidolon* projected from the impression upon our consciousness at that far-off time of the whole sensuous and psychic atmosphere of what we felt, but with all the rough edges of it, all the seamy side of it, all its garish rawness and daylight harshness, completely purged away!

Even that 'melting mood' which touches us all sometimes, when the tears of a whole-hearted response to the majestic absolute of beauty rise to the back of our eyeballs, though it may equal in passionate intensity, cannot surpass in mysterious satisfaction what we derive from these transfigured Recurrences of the Past. Whether some secret law governing their appearance, some method that can infallibly evoke them, will ever be found I cannot say; but it would seem that the rudiments of such a discovery lie in the fact that the gentle difficulties offered to an industrious but unscholarly mind by the study of a foreign tongue, especially if it be a dead tongue, are able to do what easy reading *cannot* do, namely hypnotize us into forgetting our immediate purpose, our immediate anxiety, our immediate care, and transport us to the evasive shores of those Platonic Essences which are the sceptic's substitute for Heaven.



## OLD AGE AND SCIENCE

MIGHT it not, after all, be said that the best wisdom old age can give us is summed up in the phrase *second thoughts*? Thoughts of second childhood! Well, let it be so. Second childhood is a word that cuts both ways. It is not all a reproach.

As I have presumed so often to suggest, the link that undoubtedly does exist between Old Age and Infancy is a lucky link, a heavenly link, a blessed link! And it *can* be — for there have been infants who have strangled Hydras and humbled devils — a very formidable link. It is especially formidable, and indeed menacing and even dangerous when it confronts, with the potent wrath of the aged Merlin in the guise of a child, the worst excesses of modern science.

Certainly this war has unmasked Science and displayed her in her true colours. It is the vices of science that flourish most in war-time. At the present moment, save for a few thrice-blessed palliatives for pain and patchings-up of broken bodies, Science is exhibiting a grosser brutality and a wilder fanaticism than has ever appeared in her short, feverish, double-edged, cut-both-ways career! Her face has changed of late into the face of a monster, she has now begun to threaten everything that is most precious to us; precious in the only way in which the only criterion we know anything about can judge of human values.

I admit that to some alien species of living creatures as different from the race to which for some twenty-thousand years we men and women have belonged as ours is from the Cyclops', Science as she has now shown herself, her mask now torn away, and her features revealed in all their Medusa-like ghastliness, might be completely acceptable.

We are however still men and still the children of men. We are not yet those super-insects of the appalling world that with feverish zeal and demoniacal cunning this Immanent Monster, without heart, or face, or pity, or imagination, or conscience, or tradition, or any natural old-fashioned feeling, is busy creating!

Religion was bad enough. But though the bulk of it was thrust upon us from above, there *were* aspects of it that sprang up spontaneously in

our imagination and in our nerves and instincts, and in the nerves and instincts of other ordinary men like ourselves.

It is clear that in the deliberate attempt made by the Church to force the orthodox Christian religion upon the mass of the people there was manifested the same unity of implacable purpose as is displayed in the de-personalized features of modern Science.

But when all is said it remains that the Church *did* have in its tradition, and that Christianity *did* have in its principles, and still in a measure has, *some* connection with human feelings, human poetry, human loves and hates, human desires, and passions, and fears, and hopes, as these have existed since Homo Sapiens first buried his dead.

But this new danger to the whole direction and intention of our evolution is of a much more serious nature. This New Tyranny, like the old Religious one, *comes from above*; that is to say it presupposes the imposition and pitiless infliction — upon the ordinary person, whose desire is *to be a person* — of a superhuman authority, whose cold-blooded and impersonal Propaganda plays upon the lowest as well as upon the highest of natural feelings.

What these 'Higher Authorities', all these 'Leaders' and 'Messiahs' and Priests and Prophets and Dictators have always made use of in their proud and cruel art of moulding the generations into Master-men and Untouchables, is the ignorance and superstition of the masses. Why was the Church infallible and supreme in the Middle Ages? *Because the people were illiterate.*

At the present hour in his besotted attempt to reduce all Europe to vassalage what does Hitler deliberately propose to do? He proposes to keep his serfs, especially the Poles and the Czechs, illiterate!

We humorous amateurs of a sea-protected Island can afford to treat calmly the intense feeling which the rationalistic element in France displays towards a Church of which only individual spiritual leaders have protested against Hitler's cruelty to the Jews.

Dostoevsky's fable of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* sums up this feeling and its crucial tension. The Church has *not* protected humanity, save in individual cases, with the authority that the situation demands. And why? Because the moth-like wings of Religion still hover, as we can see them do in Franco's Spain, around the fragrant candles on the Golden Bough of authority from above!

The uncomfortable truth must be admitted that both our intellectual class and our aesthetic class have in these two supreme cases of Tyrannical Infallibility, that of the Church of God and that of the church of Science, played the whore. They have known perfectly well what was going on. They have seen how subtly the harmless humorous and kindly instincts of the ordinary man and woman can be thrown into a catastrophic landslide by the fanatics of infallibility exercised from above, whether such authority be State or Church.

The curious thing is that there *are* great writers — and these are the supreme geniuses of humanity — whose work represents, embodies and is a medium for and a compendium of the common man's attitude to life.

But the champions of Infallibility, whether of Church or of State, or of Science, have it laid upon them, as one of their chief duties, to give a superior twist, a corrosive tinge, a corrupting turn, a treacherous gloss to the work of such Mediums of Common Humanity as Homer and Rabelais and Shakespeare and Cervantes and Dickens and Walt Whitman.

When you inquire, my good reader, how it can possibly be that human civilization can advance and improve *without* the help of these plaguy conspiracies of 'Great Men', and with nothing to urge it on but Nature herself and our ordinary human goodness and some obscure 'stream of tendency working for righteousness' from outside Nature, I would answer that it is a great mystery but that it is one of those mysterious 'open secrets', as Goethe calls them, which belong to the essential character of our present Dimension; and not only so but which carry about with them a rumour and an intimation of the existence of Levels of Being totally beyond and outside the one we know.

The charge most often brought against old age is that of weary, obstinate, and self-interested *conservatism*; and I do not deny that the leaders of revolutionary movements and the victims of reactionary tyrants are more often young men than old men such as that noble M. Herriot of France. Let youth rule the world — let age steer the world!

But granting that the natural conservatism of the old has often been and will be again a vicious drag upon human progress it must be remembered that there's a completely different side to it, a side upon which it is well worth pondering, a side that at this particular juncture of history stands out in terrible relief. Most youthful and middle-aged thinkers

have a tendency to take the visible universe in which we live *for granted*.

By this I mean that in all their habitual thoughts and feelings they have a tendency to assume as a basic axiom for all their theories that this material or chemical or mathematical Immensity about us — this ethereal and terraqueous Immensity reported on by our senses and 'checked up', as my brother Llewelyn would put it, by Modern Science — *is all there is*.

Now why shouldn't we, when thus tied down to this new Athanasian Creed be heartily grateful to the obstinate and instinctive conservatism of old age? All power to it if it is ready to do what *we* dare not do, boldly defy this sinister 'bulge' made by the brassy Fortinbras of Science in the ancient, cautious, and indispensable *scepticism* of the human race where the ultimate nature of reality is concerned; so that there should be, as with the *Potsdam Philosophy* of Hegel, an inrush of the devilish tyranny of the All-in-One Absolute!

This 'Glorious-Verdun' of the humane Scepticism of Old Age against an Infallible Science does what nothing less violent or terrible *can* do. It attracts the thinking-channels of all the various types, classes, castes, species, races, sections, segments, grades, circles, levels, groups, ages, tastes, cultures, and conditions into which humanity is divided, and causes them to flow — like the ditches in the water-meadows of Dorchester when the 'Drowner' is at work — nearer and nearer to one another; until in a manner startling and unfamiliar to any 'drowner', some four, some five, some six, seven, eight, nine, sluggish ditches are transformed into one fast-flowing richly fructifying, minnow-bearing noon-day-murmuring stream, to which each separate miniature Danube brings its own mental *entelechy* of shining sticklebacks, water-flies, and water-beetles!

With us, therefore, something like a real democracy is at last in sight, the evolution of which, while it gathers itself together, implies as much *conserving* of the immemorial traditions of all of us *individual animalculae* as it implies a bolder, swifter, deeper, more sunlit 'stream of tendency'. Until the beginning of this war Modern Science was pre-eminently in the hands of young men; and out of all the philosophical and moral problems wherein the voice of old age is needed to strike a desirable balance it would seem that the place of Modern Science in human civilization needs it the most.

Compared with all other branches of intellectual research Physical Science is dominated most frequently and most flagrantly by topical and

fashionable cults. These may be based upon very unsatisfactory evidence and they are always liable to be chucked overboard, in less than a decade, by a completely new set.

But if the rank and file of modern scientists follow the prevailing theories with sheeplike docility many of their leaders do worse than this. They tend — these famous and widely-honoured men — to emerge from their laboratories at increasingly frequent intervals and utter opinions on the nature of the cosmos: and if the observations of elderly clergymen are sometimes a trifle fantastic, the opinions voiced by 'great scientific authorities' have less philosophical value than Moody and Sankey's hymns.

Nothing it appears unfits a man more completely for subtle speculative thought than long hours spent in a Research Laboratory. An organ-grinder, a pavement-artist, a circus-clown knows far more about 'the Riddle of the Universe' than these bigots; each one of whom has as many letters after his name as Field-Marshal Goring has medals on his chest.

The truth is that Modern Science is possessed by a devil who is at least cousin-german to the Totalitarian Demon. And who can deny that all these dictatorial and infallible Propaganda-Offices whose existence is the chief curse of our modern world, with their unmovable principles and their unprincipled Machiavellianism is *crowded with young people* whose ideas are as stereotyped as their obedience to headquarters is sublime.

But youth of this kind is a deadly menace to the spirit of truth, and a fatal enemy to the free spirit of life. *That* great spirit, blowing where it lists, is the mother of paradoxes and the nurse of contradictions. It is the fosterer of *personality*. The most unpredictable, most anarchical, least totalitarian of all mysteries.

And it is to save us from the harsh puritanical fanaticism of this type of youth, austere and rigid in its scientific aim of dehumanizing humanity, that we have to turn to old age for our salvation. Just because it is old we have to turn to it, just because its flesh has been porous so long to the influences of earth and water and fire and air, just because it has had leisure to remember its childhood and the parents of its childhood, just because the ways and customs of past generations of men have had time to filter into its bones and mingle with its blood, just because it has watched so many scientific theories and systems and methods and fashions

come and go, just because it has had time to get the mental and the physical aspects of human life into some sort of proportion, just because it has had time to read the classics for another purpose than to pass examinations, it is in a position to put the dogmatism of Science, the pre-conceptions of Science, the assuagements and ameliorations offered by Science *into their proper place*, neither exalting this Rival of Religion into an universal and infallible Orthodoxy nor degrading it into the tricks of a Provincial Conjuror!

What in fact old age offers us as a protection from this totalitarian superstition — which is a disease rather than an ideal and is always a sign of moral cowardice — is nothing less than that *water of Life*, offered by the greatest of all Internationalist Anarchists, Jesus Christ the Jew, to the woman at His ancestor's well, namely the 'Elixir Vitae' of *Second Thoughts*. These are the thoughts, Walter Pater suggests in *Gaston de Latour*, where we learn how 'in the very hey-day of his manhood had so much of the mellow detachment of age, these are the thoughts that represent the wisdom of that impersonal 'old age' of the long generations of humanity which in its Homers and Shakespeares keeps the world-pendulum — always swinging between the two extremes — balanced between Destiny and Chance and between the Flesh and the Spirit.

Perhaps the best way in which an ordinary person can be made to realize the monstrous perversion implicit in the scientific temper of mind is a consideration of the practice of vivisection.

The human race has committed many atrocious crimes against itself, such as Slavery and the torturing of Criminals and Heretics. But our blackest crime is not against other human beings at all. It is this monstrous practice of Vivisection.

Now Races and Nations differ a great deal in regard to this crime, just as they do in the torture of human beings. In this latter abomination the Chinese head a black list, followed closely by the Spaniards and the Russians; while the Scandinavians hold the cleanest and purest record; but when it comes to Vivisection I think Americans are the worst, with ourselves and the Russians running them close.

There are three profound and widespread obstacles to the only really righteous course — the wholesale abolition of Vivisection. The first of these is the sick horror which so many people feel at the thought of the whole subject. The second is the psychological perversion known as

Sadism. And the third is the hypnotic submissiveness of ordinary laymen to the religious orthodoxy of Science.

The first of these falls on us like numbing and freezing snow. The second creates among initiates a secret freemasonry, and among outsiders misunderstandings of incredible stupidity.

While the third — supported by every kind of propaganda and authority and persecution and concealment — represents to-day, to an extent that a couple of hundred years ago would have seemed unbelievable, a return to the bigotry and cruelty of the Spanish Inquisition.

In the movement against Vivisection one meets very young people and quite old people, but scarcely over a middle-aged person; and one naturally asks why is this so? To my mind the answer is simple. *'The Secret of Old Age'*!

Let us try, reader, in any case to detach ourselves a little from the grosser and cruder aspects of the controversy. The more honest champions of Vivisection must often be shocked by the cheap sentimental trash about 'saving our babies' used in defence of these atrocities; and I know for myself, as a quiet philosopher among its opponents, how disgusted I have been sometimes at the rosy-posy-hysterical, lap-dog-like atmosphere of some of the groups on my own side.

But from a purely psychological point of view the fact that, in our crucial test-campaign against the New Orthodoxy, old age rather than youth should lead the Minority is I think worth noting. One advantage old age has certainly got in the struggle of Humanity against Science; and that is the power of expressing itself in simple terms!

To get this appalling crime stopped the chief thing to do is to publicize it; in other words to get the astounding facts, so craftily hidden by these cowardly and respectable torturers, before the attention of the ordinary man and the ordinary woman.

Why, one asks, does the super-distinguished gentility of the 'B.B.C.' fight so shy of Anti-Vivisection truth?

There is no doubt that if all ordinary laymen knew the truth — just the plain unequivocal truth about vivisection — the greatest obstacle to its abolition would be removed. Is *that* the reason why the vested interests of Science keep this whole subject dark? And they are put to their shifts to defend it contrariwise! 'No layman can understand,' they say; and then again: 'Anyone can see the good we do to humanity.' As a matter of

fact they care nothing for humanity. Go into one of these Torture-Chambers and at once a white-coated 'hero of science', whom their propagandists in the Press and the Pictures would say was 'giving up his life for humanity', will clap his hands over your eyes. 'Purely scientific' he will hurriedly apologize. 'Don't look! Don't listen!'

Their whole passion is for knowledge at all costs. Somebody ought to invent a new 'scientific' name for this perversion, which in the long run will prove more dangerous than homicide. It is one of the most ironical and comical travesties of the truth to talk of these maniacs 'devoting their lives'. It is the animals who are 'devoting their lives'; or rather having their lives 'devoted'.

What a friend of mine saw on one occasion, before some white-coated 'Sworn Tormentor' intervened, were dozens of dogs, with their entrails exposed, in various attitudes of crucifixion.

It would be interesting to determine in this connection — I mean in connection with these impaled and crucified dogs — the precise stage of moral development to which the slowly-evolved Conscience of an ordinary Christian must arrive before his worship of Vicarious Suffering sees *every* innocent victim of the Spirit of Cruelty as a *Redeemer of the World*?

This is no blasphemy nor sentimentality. This is the *logos* of our historical development, under evolutionary pressure, of the philosophy of Jesus Christ. To extend the revelation — or, better say, the *revolution* — of Jesus Christ till it includes the animal world is simply to obey that Divine Spirit in human evolution which Jesus Himself swore he would bequeath to us when he was dead.

Thus, just as there used to occur certain symbolic and metaphysical riots in the streets of Constantinople at the end of the fifth century when the heretical Monophysite war-cry so terrifying to the hordes of the orthodox went up: 'Thrice-holy! one and only God who was crucified for us, have mercy upon us!' so those of us in these days who have joined the revolt against the Imperialism of science ought to be able to raise a cry that would make these 'white-coated devotees of humanity' shudder in their secretest torture-chambers.

Just as non-combatants in a war against these Fascists and Nazis pray day and night that Hitler may be defeated, so we other non-combatants — I mean those among us who are too timid to do what the Christians did



who flung themselves to the lions to stop the Gladiatorial Shows — ought to pray day and night for the abolition of Vivisection.

And we ought to make this prayer as *definite* and as *particular* as we can. Reduced to its irrefutable and ultimate nature, to the essence within it that cannot be resolved into anything else, and cannot be dissolved by any argument, *what is prayer?*

Here indeed is a subject adapted to what almost might be called the Profession of the Old. If the young are experts in love, the old are experts in prayer. Prayer is the oldest of all the arts except the dance. It is an experiment whose antiquity reduces all scientific experiments to dust and ashes. It has been practised by the whole human race since Homo Sapiens first appeared on this earth. It is by no means outside the bounds of possibility that the more intelligent animals have long been making the same experiment; and the very smile with which we reject such a notion betrays the race-narrowness of our breed.

It is of course a double-edged experiment as all old men know. On the one hand we endeavour to side-track the march of destiny and on the other to draw new strength and new spirit to endure the destined.

It is conceivable enough that when the present unbalanced craze for sacrificing character and conscience to a mania for knowledge passes away, as all such specialized manias eventually do, there will be a renewed interest in the greatest of all the real evolutionary sciences, namely the science, and the *art* too, of the mind's power over the body.

An old man's body is like an old fiddler's violin or an old painter's palette of mixed pigments. He has learnt tricks with this medium he knows so well that to passionate youth or to practical middle-age would seem simply miraculous. This great *science-art* of the domination of the body by the mind, is only now beginning to open what might be called its Second Act.

How magically, when we begin the 'Third Act', will our much-enduring ego wield and brandish, sheathe and unsheathe, its shining servant the body! We are at this moment considering our ticklish subject as it strikes a simple ordinary old man's conscience; and it seems to me that such a conscience is much less likely to be sidetracked by suppressed passions and morbid manias than the conscience of youth.

The two worst crimes of the human race are Slavery and Vivisection and in both these cases all manner of plausible and fine-sounding argu-

ments have been found to justify them. The first of these arguments depends on the abstraction that is called 'necessity' and the natural person's conscience smells wickedness the moment it hears that dangerous word! Slavery and Vivisection, so we are assured, are *necessary* for man's physical well-being.

But what about his moral well-being? What about his soul? This 'devilish plea' as Milton calls it, leads us to their second fine-sounding argument. Tyrants who aim at reducing their own people to serfdom and their neighbours to slavery are able in these days of Infallible Science to appeal to the pretended 'Law' of the 'Survival of the Fittest'. Either God or Evolution has destined some men to be super-men and certain races to be super-races, cleverer, fiercer, stronger, more war-loving than the rest. And that these should unscrupulously dominate others is the will and purpose either of God — if we bother about *Him*! — or of Evolution.

The third argument used by Slave-dealers, Fascists, and Vivisectors is of a completely different type, and is much more subtle, specious, plausible, and insidious.

In this third argument the Devil — as the saying is — 'quotes scripture'. In other words our fanatical bigots of the Holy and Apostolic Scientific Church use the same argument as Ivan Karamazov's Inquisitor; namely that the infliction of torture is lawful if we are thereby saving souls, curing diseases, supporting God and Religion or establishing Justice or Truth or Beauty.

This third argument has seduced by its aesthetic and idealistic appeal many sagacious intellectual persons. It brings into its scope for example the opinion of the Greek Philosophers that the Institution of Slavery, by making possible a Perfect Life for the few, improves the quality of our race.

One of the chief reasons why *the protest of old age* against this fashionable orthodoxy is so formidable is that the 'vested interests' — that is to say those who earn their living as well as their honour and glory by this cruel practice — are extremely nervous lest the mass of ordinary people should discover the abominable horrors that go on in what are so innocently described as 'Research Laboratories'.

That these Inquisitors *are* extremely conscious of what the Public would feel if it knew what goes on in temple-courts of their monstrous

Idol, Moloch-Baphomet, the God of knowledge at all cost, can be conclusively proved by two things — *first*, by the nature of their public propaganda, and *second*, by the irritableness of their personal temper.

Is it perhaps in proportion to the degree of its escape from *the itch of sex* that old age is able to weigh Modern Science in the balance? At any rate as those know who have read *Faust* — not to speak of that Tragic-Comic Opera of youthful conceit, Byron's *Manfred* — the lust for power over Nature is as powerful as the lust for power over women.

Indeed, it has been one of the indirect causes of the present world-suffering 'No Bishop — no King!' No Physical Science — no Totalitarianism!

From almost every point of view — just as happened with the Industrial Revolution — the initial effects of Modern Science have been devilish; and they will continue to be so, until the common sense and the moral conscience of the rank and file of ordinary men and women succeed in getting this lop-sided mental activity under the control of a balanced human character.

One of the chief *issues* in the present conflict, whatever its *causes* may have been, is the battle between impersonal efficiency and individual happiness; and the tragic thing is that, while the fortunes of this battle fluctuate, our side finds itself compelled to use more and more of the weapons of the enemy. Though we have not yet come to the point of compelling our prisoners to sing 'Rule Britannia', the value of a united and single control of strategy and policy grows daily more evident. And yet it remains that we still steadily feel at the bottom of our island hearts that this whole business of Dictatorships and 'Number Ones' and Totalitarian 'Messiahs' is from a healthy and human point of view not only wicked but cowardly and contemptible.

Never was the root of all liberty — I refer to the rights of the individual — in such appalling danger as it is to-day. The truth is that at this present hour the right of the individual to be as frivolous as he likes, to think what he likes, to say what he likes, to make love as he likes, to eat and drink what he likes, as long as he doesn't interfere with the same privilege in others, is beginning to shake in its socket.

And this is all wrong. Let him be as anarchistic as he pleases; as long as he obeys the laws and earns an honest living he has a perfect right to be as critical of his own government as of any other. He has a right to

criticize the whole idea of government: as long as, while the laws *are* the laws, he obeys them.

Such a right is guaranteed by the fact that he is born a man and not an insect. But youth is too busy with its love-affairs and middle-age too busy with its practical activities to see the appalling *de-humanization* with which Modern Science, in the hands of its fanatical leaders, is threatening humanity. The triumph of Science, like the triumph of the Nazis, will mean the era of the *totalitarian anti-heap*. Only the prolonged earth-experience of old age stands between us and this biological catastrophe.

The whole idea of the Fascists and Nazis is based on the Philosophy of Hegel; and the Philosophy of Hegel conceals in its essence the most dangerous Idea that has ever been invented by man, the Idea of *the Absolute*. This is the notion of a completely rounded-off 'block-universe' from which, as from a Snake with its tail in its mouth, there is no escape.

How wise was Goethe — so infinitely the greatest of all Germans — in his words to Eckermann: 'I thank God that *my study of Nature* has preserved me from these Hegelian tricks!'

Once turn our present astronomical Dimension into an Absolute and all is lost. Our ridiculously limited universe becomes *all there is*, while our equally limited human logic, rebaptizing itself as 'Spirit', a word that can mean anything, becomes *the Idea*, that is to say becomes the inclusive Truth and sole reality; in other words becomes the Absolute!

Thus the conjuring-trick is accomplished and the Philosophy of Hegel retorts to the true Philosophy of Kant — when this latter declares that 'the Thing in Itself' is outside our grasp — 'The Spirit of Man is the thing in Itself: the Idea of Man is the Absolute.'

Well, there you are! Once substitute for the mystery of Nature and for the Multiverse beyond Nature a rounded-off 'block-universe', as William James calls it, of which the spirit is Man, and Man becomes the Absolute.

And what happens then? Why then, if Man is the Absolute, all categorical difference between Good and Evil disappears. Good is what suits Man-Absolute; Evil is what doesn't just suit Absolute Man. And if he decides to gratify his scientific curiosity to the limit, by the application of torture to the helpless, there is no Categorical Imperative, deeper than life, older than the earth, to make him stay his bloody hand. He is himself the totalitarian *All*; the ultimate, cosmic *Number One*; and beyond him there is nothing. All is permitted to him: nothing is forbidden.

This Hegelian idea of making man the absolute; and astronomical space-time *all there is*; is an idea that leads to every kind of horror. In a literal sense *nothing*, now or ever, matters, or can matter, in such a world. But the moment you concentrate attention upon an actual living personal individual this whole theory breaks down. Man may be anything just because essentially he is nothing.

The only oracle of God is, as Emily Brontë held, the God within a separate individual breast. The only true morality is that of the common man's conscience and the common man's conscience is a medium for the Unknowable.

It is the duty of this conscience to decide what is right and wrong, not only for the individual but for the State and 'Man in General'. Neither the Church nor the State, and certainly not the Family, have a right to dictate what is good and evil. The only dictator 'in thik little job' is the mysterious Voice, or perhaps the mysterious Silence, for which the individual soul is a weak, irrational, vicious, ignorant *medium*; and it follows from this that all such judgment is relative; and it follows from *that* that this very war is a fight to the death between the devilish Absolute and the divine Relative.

We have had wars between races before, between religions before, but this war is more than that; this war is between two rival systems of life, each of them founded on its own metaphysical and psychological philosophy.

Behind the armies of Hitler and Mussolini, behind the Reactionaries in Spain and the Quislings in Norway, looms up, portentous and sinister, this *Absolute Spirit* of the Murderous Philosophy of Hegel. It looms up behind Ogpu and Gestapo alike. It looms up behind the Catholic Church.

Wherever any 'Tremendum Mysterium' in Politics or Religion is rounded-off by a ruthless orthodoxy and imposed on the common people you find the Absolute of Hegel. 'So young man,' jeered the Aryan Hegel to the Semitic Heine, 'so you want a bonus because you've not murdered your father and poisoned your mother?' Heine's answer to this should have been the Homeric retort that he was afraid of his mother's Erinyes!

A New Era is beginning; and the best sign we could have that the Spirit of God was really moving on the face of the waters would be the abolition of Vivisection and the general recognition that over war, over trade, over classes and races, over production and distribution, over the pursuit of

knowledge, over the pursuit of power, over money, over pleasure, over religion, over science, ruled an imperative at once practical, merciful, and humorous — the imperative of *simple goodness*!

Old Age, whatever its weaknesses, shares, as King Lear reminds us, its experience with the experience of 'the Heavens above'. But it is extremely important to define with the utmost philosophical nicety what exactly we mean by this 'goodness' which in the nature of things has alone the right to rule over the whole world.

It is for this reason that I have dared to risk offence by applying to it the rather startling epithet 'humorous'; for it is above all necessary to expel any sort of fanaticism from a *Christian* Imperative that is to rule the world, and it is impossible to think of a check upon fanaticism and bigotry more effective than an unremitting sense of humour.

At the end of this war when Hitler and Japan are defeated — and we cannot resist a hope that their defeat will drag down with it the cruel and comic reactionaries in Spain — there will be a chance, an opportunity, for some improvements in the affairs of men.

I applied the term 'comic' as well as 'cruel' to the absurd Franco and his grotesque 'Blue Shirts' for a sufficient reason. The cruelty of religious fanaticism always seems to the ordinary man's mind to be not only wicked but ridiculous. And so it seemed to Rabelais and Shakespeare and Cervantes and Montaigne.

The author of Don Quixote shows up the absurdity of such solemn devilry by making Sancho decorate Dapple with the flaming *sanbenito* which is the special insignia of the historic rival of Vivisection, the most monstrous as well as the most ridiculous Institution that has ever disgraced humanity — *the Holy Inquisition*.

The simple goodness that hates cruelty is beyond reason and logic. What I am hinting at when I utter the physical sound of these simple syllables is a power, an essence, a creative energy, a life-sap, an electric current, a psychic vibration, which must always baffle, always overflow and overbrim, every attempt to define and limit it.

But the reason why it is so important to emphasize the element of humour as belonging to the supreme essence of goodness, is because, when we encounter the corresponding supreme essence of *evil*, we need the best of our *good* to battle with it.

Now from the point of view of philosophical and psychological

analysis the supreme essence of evil is *inert malice*, and it rationally follows from this that the most important element in good will be found to be the exact opposite to inert malice — that is to say energetic kindness! But at this point something else has to be taken into consideration.

I refer to the fact that life is anything but identical with the conclusions of philosophical analysis, but always has an irresponsible and irrational tendency to burst out, to brim over, to leak through, to break forth.

Let us reconsider then our supreme quality of 'goodness' — that is to say *energetic kindness* — with a view to enriching it and thickening it with one at least of those erratic, impalpable, undefinable impulses in our nature, which, although in themselves neither 'good' nor 'evil', have the peculiarity of confusing, mixing up, transcending, revaluing, perturbing, exploding, escaping, and in Pautagruehian phrase *metagrabolizing* the logical and rational opposition of inert malice and energetic kindness.

And what among these overbrimming anarchical currents could serve our turn better than what we have come to call 'humour'? And be it noted that there is an immense gulf between humour and all its accidental camp-followers; but just because the unsqueamishness of humour enables it to put up with its curious bed-fellows the gulf between it and them grows daily wider as civilization becomes more sophisticated.

The common man knows perfectly well where the deepest and truest essence of humour lies, but it would be absolutely impossible for him to define this essence in intelligible words. Anyway, we all feel that the essential nature of real humour differs from the sardonic, or the witty, or the facetious, or the comic, or the ludicrous, or the sarcastic, or the ironic, or the arch, or the playful, or any other kind of whimsical levity.

I think it is a matter of *character*. I think that all deep and authentic humour has to do with a person's permanent and constant character. A humorous character is a character possessed at the very root and soul of its being of a certain 'diverting twist' — so Lamb if I remember right calls it — or, if you prefer, a certain mellow detachment, full of original sap and sweet marrow.

As with all ultimate human qualities there mingles with this essential humour an element of the unfathomable. It would not be a quality of the human mind if this were not so — for it is of course the human mind, and *not* the so-called 'laws', or observed sequences of the 'electric' and 'chemic' composition of the physical universe, that is the ultimate mys-

tery; and the only place where we can look for the secrets of that life which lies beyond 'the universe'.

In this whole matter of analysing humour it is obvious how much weight we are forced to concede to old age merely on the strength of its long experience. The longer a thing has had time to display itself in all its varieties and contradictions and the longer we have been permitted to observe its effects the subtler will our interpretation of it be.

While Science goes on neglecting mental processes in favour of physical ones it will continue to be oblivious of the miraculous effects that the minds even of dogs and monkeys — not to mention men and women — can work upon matter. 'Back to the mind! All power to the mind!'

Such and no less should be the pass-word of this generation. Back to our 'glassy essence', back to the psyche, the soul, the self, the personality, the individual, the spirit, the mind, and even, in Kantian phrase, the 'synthetic unity of apperception'!

Now since we must accept Kant's masterly reduction of our rational knowledge to the limits of Time and Space, and at the same moment must recognize that this Time and Space universe is *not* all there is, 'it stands', as we so quaintly say, 'to reason' that we must rigorously discount and reject all those mystical intuitions, intimations, visions, and illuminations, which, in the nature of the case, that is to say according to the inescapable categories of the mind itself, can never reveal what lies behind Time and Space.

There remain however two profoundly important and indeed axiomatic qualifications to this situation, the first having to do with the fact that though we cannot know anything at all about what exists outside Time and Space we *do* know, with an unshakable knowledge, that there *is* such an 'outside' — and the second having to do with the nature of *conscience*.

These two things might indeed be called the only 'transcendental bribe' which the human mind can honestly offer to its Space-Time gaoler.

As far as I am concerned there is nothing to be done but honestly submit to the Kantian Critique. 'Why?' you ask and I will tell you why. *Because it is based on the inescapable conditions of all conceivable thought.*

Nevertheless, there still remain these two transcendental qualifications;



and these two together can take the whole of our Present Dimension and push it back! Like one of the gnomonic choruses in an ancient Greek Tragedy the voices of the old are for ever reminding us that the astronomical universe is not all there is but that there are dimensions of life beyond the particular pinfold in which we are 'confined and pestered'.

The truth is we are simultaneously forced by the necessity of thought itself to recognize that, although we must remain in blank and absolute ignorance as to its nature, *there is that in ourselves* which already belongs to this Unknowable which is beyond the categories of space-time.

But the worst of the ridiculously bigoted attitude of these irresponsible scientists is that not content with rejecting conscience, morality, philosophy, history and poetry, they also reject the most simple and obvious common sense.

Isn't it *on the face of it* extremely improbable that there should swing on its hinges throughout an unthinkable 'for ever' — itself a fantastic concept of insane logic; for what can a person make of such a 'For ever' of Nothingness? — a blind, deaf, dumb, and senseless universe, *which is all there is?*

But this preposterous dogma, far more staggering to the simple mind than any theological definition of 'original sin' or 'redemption' or 'divine grace', is the cool assumption underlying the ridiculous modern catchword 'Science teaches'! The resemblance between the authoritative tone of this 'teaching' of Science and the tone of the old Doctors of the Church is certainly startling.

And how browbeaten we let ourselves be by these new Inquisitioners! Try the experiment, sceptical reader, of meddling with the procedure of one of these Infernal Circles of Torment and note the Dantesque disdain with which you're treated by these white-coated Messengers of 'the Emperor of the Universe'!

What our fanatical young people forget when with their heads full of the latest tags and catchwords of topical Science they dismiss — metaphorically-speaking to the *firing squad* but anyway to the Lethal Chamber of the Dated-and-Damned — their unsquared, unconverted, unpropagandized, unconscionable grandparents, is that in all other planetary growths and terrestrial evocations *merely to have lasted so long a time*, merely to have seen the sun rise and set, and the moon pass through her transformations, for the larger part of a century, was and still is, in some lands, a matter for religious reverence!

Old cities, old books, old buildings, old trees, old pictures, old myths, old mountains, old rivers, old birds, old beasts, old fishes are all counted by an universal instinct in humanity — and I could call Homer and Æschylus and Shakespeare and Rabelais to 'bear witness on my side — to be superior to entities and existences of the same class and kind and field of discussion, who as 'it' says — that divine anonymous 'it' that we only use for our very greatest *logoi*! — 'Shall never see so much or live so long!'

'We would have been glad enough to have seen more, my venerable sir, and to have lived as long as yourself,' a young victim of the present war might retort, 'but luckily for you *we* put our country above our life.'

Well! There it is! When we come to wrangling about war-sacrifices there is no end to the embarrassments and shames and ironies and suppressed indignations that are stirred up — willy-nilly — in our human, too human hearts!

One thing, anyway, cannot be denied in this ancient argument, and that is that the admirable scientific progress made in the matter of air-raids and the dropping of bombs, has brought it about that this war is a much *fairer war*, as far as the equalizing of the chances of death and pain are concerned than the last one.

In a successful scientific raid on a crowded city the deaths of the old and young are as equal as those of the two sexes and there are many women and doubtless some old men who greatly prefer that it should be so.

But the question to be asked is a simple one. What has made the power of destruction in this war greater than that of all the Ostro-Goths, Visi-Goths, Vandals, Huns, Burgundians, Lombards, Saxons, Jutes, in the Dark Ages, all added together? What has made possible the most immoral, insidious, corrupting, vulgarizing, debasing, degrading, de-humanizing Devil's Agency that has ever existed?

I refer of course to *Propaganda* or the Press-Gang for minds under seventy. What has made possible these monstrous despotisms of ferocious and inhuman power, over people's minds, souls, and body? What has given the modern tyrant a power that would make Tambelaine and the Great Mogul and Nero and Tiberius and the Emperor Justinian sick with envy? *Science!* What makes the Ogpu and the Gestapo possible? *Science!* What created the whole Black Art of *Vivisection applied to the Soul*, that was responsible for Hitler's rise to absolute authority? *Science!*

What has riddled, rotted, and finally dissolved, filling its place with gross and fantastic superstitions, the humane, inspiring, stimulating, assuaging, comforting, fortifying ideas of true human Philosophy in our modern world? *Science!* What has unminged and given a sinister and evil twist to the central Pivot upon which our whole moral and mental life revolves so that in place of our natural, philosophical, human faculties working in harmony together, in place of any moral imperative directed towards a wise and human handling of practical life, we have a set of transitory, unrealizable, unfounded hypotheses dealing entirely with material, chemical and magnetic forces and substituting 'Entropy' and 'Relativity' and the 'Quantum theory' for the creative spirit we can understand *from within because we share in it ourselves?* *Science!*

The one supreme product of Evolution since this planet cooled down from its original gaseous blaze is not Buddhism or Christianity. It is not even Confucianism. It is simple, unequivocal *Goodness*, whether shown by animals or by men.

And against what has Science directed the sharpest spear-point of its devilish armoury and the chief battery of its conscience-killing arsenal?

Against this very thing — against mercy and pity and compassion. '*Liquidate them all!*' is the slogan of our *Vita Nuova* and '*Room for the Robots!*' The real underlying issue in this war is a planetary one, concerning the whole human race and its chances of survival *as* the human race. It is a biological issue in the deepest evolutionary sense! It has to do with the type of living creature that we wish or do not wish to inherit the earth. Is this type to be one whose highest virtue is enjoyment of power? Or is it to be one where a civilized hatred of force and brutality and a natural preference for goodness prevail over all else?

And what has this preposterous Infallibility of Science to utter on this question? *Nothing at all!* As might be expected where our race really does need intelligent guidance Science has simply nothing to 'teach'.

And it is the same with everything else. Compared with those immemorial guides, Religion and Philosophy, which our race has possessed from the beginning, this aggressive modern cult, which is a thing of yesterday, is dumb as Dagon, 'on the grunsel edge', shaming its worshippers.

Speaking roughly I suppose this vivisectioning modern Science is about two hundred years old; and when you consider the fantastic unreliability

of its teachings you feel that Scientific truth has not won, as we say, 'over' Catholic truth.

And yet with what touching credulity the mass of ordinary doctors and medical students repeat the parrot-cries of these fashionable 'Research Laboratories'! Man, it would seem, henceforth is to live not by 'Vitamins alone' but by every new theory that issues from the blade of the *Lancet*!

But try the experiment, reader. Begin to take seriously what 'Science teaches'; and you'll soon find that life has become a ghastly farrago of monstrous fancies. Vivisectioners are the narrowest and most bigoted of all half-educated people. When you next encounter one of the portentous officials of the 'Holy Office' turn the tables on him and ask *him* a few questions. He is a human being like the rest of us. He is no god. If you prick him he'll howl; if you tickle him he'll wriggle. And if you challenge him, you'll soon find all he can do is to utter a few technical sentences couched in a specialized jargon entirely unintelligible to the ordinary man — and then change the subject!

He is not enough of a philosopher to be able to translate even his own curious verbiage into ordinary language. Well! If he refuses to help you to cross the bridge into *his* country, you must take a leaf from his book and become very particular in regard to the literary or aesthetic niceties of *your* cult, in the extreme opposite mental direction!

Try him, in fact, with the simplest literary problem; and the chances are you'll be staggered by the lack of ordinary human intelligence that this desperado of Knowledge-at-all-costs will display.

I would even go so far as to predict — if the man isn't completely stupid — the particular line he'll take. He'll express contempt for the easy-going, fairy-tale optimism of the classics; and he'll roundly declare that for a book to have a real intellectual appeal it must be psycho-analytically, pathologically, and physiologically *painful*.

Short of this scientific ideal, it were wise, he would hint, to confine our literary debouchings to the Dead-End Detective Series and the Oleander Novelettes.

Aye! how the Pendulum swings! And is it not likely that it is due to this tough 'austerity' of the Research-Laboratory type of Mind that we owe the recent fantastic 'racket' in the first-edition business and the consequent descent to the sixpenny box of the works of Walter Pater and Henry James?

But to the 'second thoughts' of an elderly book-lover this Neo-Realistic Laboratory-School, in its close affinity to the Nazi 'New Order', is not content with casting a blight upon the classics, it is just as withering in its narrow aridity in regard to the other immemorial pleasures of life. Its irrepressible sympathy with all the savage ideals of Totalitarian Discipline can be seen in its Puritanical Cult of social Hygiene.

'Science teaches' that we must give up as 'degenerate self-indulgence' at least half of the amiable palliatives that are our human compensation for life's miseries. What an enemy to this sort of sterile asceticism was 'the Great Heathen', Goethe! Every separate individual person, declared the author of *Faust*, has an inalienable right to his personal, peculiar, and particular pleasures! Without such pleasures—adjusted to a person's private humour—we cannot, Goethe declares, get our destined tasks fulfilled!

But the orthodoxy of scientific austerity threatens to impose its bleak hygiene upon our unwilling senses; threatens to do what Plato's Fascist Guardians did in his ideal republic, decide how we shall make love and which of us shall be permitted to have children, and under what symbol, if any, we shall worship God.

At this moment all the Powers of Satan in the world, using Science as the darling engine of their wave-lashing screws, are at the crest of their wave! The foam of the battle mounts higher and higher; but to the Watchers in the Crow's Nest of Destiny there is already visible on the horizon the low dark rocks, and above the rocks the long ray-shafts of the Lighthouse, where this devil-tide will be broken and dispersed!

It cannot be repeated often enough that this Monstrous Parody on true Philosophy which calls itself Physical Science is something quite distinct from Mathematics. Not Mathematics, not Chemistry, not even Astronomy has the true 'Oxford Accent' of Science. For *that* we have to go to the Research Laboratories.

Well! I suppose the most famous exile from the Nazi brutality of our time, at any rate in its Anti-Semitic aspect, has been Einstein. And is it not clear that this great Propounder of Relativity, whose method is as mathematical as his conclusions are ambiguous, will inevitably, when he passes to the Elysian Fields, attach himself to the pavilion of Plato rather than to the laboratories of Pavlov or Pasteur?

What we ordinary human beings, possessed of intelligence, conscience,

and common sense, must get into our heads is that *we ourselves*, self-respecting, law-abiding, humorous, fatalistic individuals, are the true inheritors of the accumulated earth-wisdom of the generations; whereas over and over again we have been hypnotized, gulled, misled, corrupted, betrayed by the two kinds of priestcraft — the Religious kind and the Scientific kind! This is the point over which our sturdy and obstinate Rationalists make such a grave mistake.

We want more rebels on behalf of liberty like John Milton. We want men who have the wit to see that the unscrupulous despotism of Physical Science differs not a scantling from the tyranny of the Inquisition, and, in Miltonic language, is simply Old Theology writ small.

It is a comical thing to hear one of these conceited young springalds of vivisection roundly abuse the churches for the precise sort of bigoted and cruel prejudice of which his own teachers are so palpably guilty.

What we must never forget is that at this particular . . . in history — and perhaps *only* at this particular turning-point in the whole history of our race — a thousand unfortunate conditions, among which of course our own only too obvious faults take by no means the least place — brought it about that there really was a horrible and ghastly chance of this biological crime succeeding.

Such a devil's chance may never appear again; because henceforth all men of goodwill — incidentally abolishing Vivisection — will curb science in the name of righteousness and humanity.

The Gestapo is simply a German Research-Laboratory for the de-humanizing of Europe. It is deliberately designed to hypnotize us all by sick terror, especially those with Jewish blood and international sympathies into the mental condition of slaves.

Hitler pretends that all our talk about Liberty is the hypocrisy of Capitalism; whereas the truth is that Capitalism with all its crimes is only the colossal Defect of the Quality of Liberty and by no means an essential element of democracy.

The true definition of democracy is *Government from Below*; and its enemy is always the same — in whatever mask it may appear — namely *Government from Above*. The earth-born doctrine that ordinary men and women should govern themselves and not be governed from above appears to be one of the secret intentions that Nature has been aiming at since the beginning of our history.

The worst of it is that only a few specially sensitized *mediums* among ordinary men and woman seem able to articulate what we all feel! It was this inert 'dumbness' in us, this 'stupid being', this vegetable opacity and non-conductingness, that gave Hitler, who is simply an ordinary man possessed by a legion of power-devils and with a rabbit's ear to every wind that blows, and his Japanese Allies — for nothing could be more unnatural to the Italians than this vivisection of humanity by a cynical science — their initial success.

The attempt was really an assault upon the whole great Spiral movement of civilization; that movement which is always *returning upon its advance*, but never quite back to its latest restart; that movement which has behind it the wish-fulfilling urge of all souls; that movement which is the expression of the 'second thoughts' of the human race

## OLD AGE AND THE NEW ORDER

AMONG the 'second thoughts' of old age during this cataclysmic war some of the most interesting as well as some of the most instinctive would naturally have to do with the New Order to be established by the Free Nations when all state-organized worshippers of Satan have been forced into unconditional surrender.

Now old age has nothing if not a *long view* to offer to the inhabitants of our three-dimensional world. This 'long view' is the natural result of a long life, during which so many 'short views' have prevailed for a day only to be swallowed up in absolute oblivion or preserved in museums and libraries along with 'codices' in parchment and 'ogams' in stone.

The 'long view' is a living epitome of an unthinkable number of 'second thoughts'; but will doubtless — as we struggle to become a medium for it — contain innumerable earth-born prejudices. Surveying, then, this titanic war from start to finish as some superhuman watcher might do from the Himalayan fastnesses of Tibet, the inevitable stages of the delayed victory of Divine Intention will become clearer than it is possible, or even perhaps desirable, to see them to-day.

The beginning of the earthquake will then be observed in Japan's invasion of Manchuria; while, encouraged by this piracy, Franco's reactionary triumph over the Spanish People and Mussolini's Conquest of Abyssinia will reveal themselves as the second and third scenes of the first Act in this world-upheaving play.

Our Tibetan watcher will then proceed to note how Hitler's incredible invasion of Europe follows hard upon his support of Franco, while the Fall of France will ring the curtain down upon the final scene of the first Act.

What our Himalayan watcher will be bound to appreciate, as the terrific drama unfolds before him, will be the manner in which the Intention of the Gods — I speak as a Pluralist — works itself out, stage after stage and protagonist after protagonist

Following the Fall of France the brunt of the business will be seen



descending upon this island; and what has come to be known as the Battle of Britain will emerge as the focus-point of the planet-wide struggle.

It will doubtless be revealed to our watcher in Tibet how beautifully and how terribly the divine 'stream of tendency' in the history of the world, 'the mysterious power not ourselves', as Matthew Arnold calls it, that works through us, has shifted the tragic *Post of Resistance* to the common enemy from one Protagonist to another. At the beginning it was China. Then it was the destiny of Britain to bear the brunt. Then it was, and still is, the turn of Russia; and after that of the United States; and in each case the part played by the four nations in the vast conflict, by pure chance, it might appear, but by chance governed by some inherent destiny in the national character concerned, has been most curiously adapted to the nature of the player. To take one example of what I mean: only the Russians could have dealt with the great Prussian-led German army; and so the gods flung it against them. But long before we were concerned, long before Russia or America were concerned, the watcher in Tibet must have regarded the resistance offered by China to the aggression of Japan with a profound appreciative understanding.

And always waiting for the end and never without his shrewd instinct as to the final upshot, the common man in all these four commonwealths of liberators has had to listen, with scarce a moment's relief or intermission, to the chaotic, contradictory, sharp-shooting fire-crackers of our Intellectuals, deciding what kind of world it will be that will take the place of the old world in the new Dispensation. Two things have been left unthought-of, undetermined, unresolved in these lively and paradoxical discussions; and these two are: first, the intentions of Providence; and second, the actual desire of the ordinary man and the ordinary woman, in China, in the British Commonwealth of Nations, in the Soviet Republic, and in the United States.

It is easy to see why the intention of the gods, or, if you will, of Nature and Evolution, along with the actual personal desire of the individuals composing the vast majority of the human race, should thus have been eliminated from the Great Discussion while the expert views, the scientific views, the moral views, the philosophical views, the economic-political views, of the Intellectuals of all these four Liberating Communities have been contradicting one another.

In the war with our common enemy it has been found absolutely

necessary to make use of the Totalitarian Method of this enemy. So, and only so, could we hope to win in this tremendous struggle. The most important of all questions therefore — namely, what Evolution is aiming at, and what the ordinary person in the British Commonwealth of Nations, the ordinary person in China, the ordinary person in Russia and the United States, *actually would like to happen* — has been of necessity thrown into the background and side-tracked. In place of the Intention of evolution, in place of the Desire of the ordinary human being, we have all of us been so hypnotized by governmental, totalitarian propaganda, that when the duty of expressing our own secret, natural, universal-particular wishes arises, we are dumb and mute as so many mackerel in a shoal!

The avalanche of this world-convulsion revealed itself at first while it took its course according to the hidden intention of evolution, as possessed of two levels. On the upper one of these levels our tremendous antagonists unfailingly, invariably, repeatedly, constantly, ridiculously *won*.

But on the lower one it was just the opposite. Here, gradually, slowly, obscurely, inevitably, we, the four Commonwealths of the Liberation, moved towards the fulfilment of the intention of evolution. The repeated victories of the enemy and the grotesquely monotonous excuses we made to explain them were due to the same identical cause — *their* love of war; *our* dislike of it.

The enemy wanted to win more than he wanted anything on earth — and so he *did* win! He wanted it more than money, more than health, more than the satisfaction of love or lust or ambition. He wanted it more than wife or child or parent. He wanted it more than beauty, more than truth, more than goodness; more than any aspect of the elements or of nature — more than Nature herself!

He wanted it as a *white ant* wants the triumph of its ant-heap. I am entirely justified in maintaining — though my intellectual friends laugh at me for such a view — that there has been no war like this war since mythological times. Isn't that simply a way of saying that there has been no such war since, in the 'obscure backward' of our planet's history, 'the Intention of Evolution', 'the Stream of tendency not ourselves', 'the Purpose of Providence' — for in these things 'the name', as Goethe said, 'is sound and smoke' — was threatened by some totalitarian insurrection under the Titans of the Abyss?

And the poets declare — for poets, not priests, were the *idei-mongers* in those days — that in this remote Reaction of brute force Briareus, the most terrifying of all the Titans, wavered between the Son of Chronos and his enemies.

What to us Britishers is shocking, with something like a magnetic disturbance in the psychic antennae of our Romanized, Normanized, Celticized, Judaized soul, about both our German and Japanese enemies is this same *totalitarian obsession* in them, a totalitarianism that swallows up all personality, all individuality, all distinction between right and wrong, all good and evil, all justice and injustice, all mercy and cruelty.

It is as if around and beneath every separate individual of German or Japanese blood there hovered the 'Aura' of an enormous, undifferentiated, living entity, like that monstrous cuttle-fish in *Moby Dick*, a creature whose weird and sinister 'oneness' cannot be destroyed by any severance of any portion of its body, a creature at once indestructible and sub-human.

Now is it not a significant thing that to the living composition of this sub-human *totemic entity*, this monstrous tribal organism wherein the individual is lost in the race, it is chiefly youth that offers up its flesh and blood? In all the countries where nationalism is predominant it is youth who takes the lead.

This cuttle-fish creature with its sub-human 'squid' life is a creation of youth. It is essentially a sex-phenomenon, with an element approximating to, though never quite reaching, something resembling homosexual incest. It communicates to its members in fact a particular orgiastic thrill, something like that strange *rapture of identity* with which in the Orphic and Dionysiac Mysteries the votary — *the young votary* — mingled his being with the being of his particular divinity.

The whole phenomenon of Germanic and Japanese race-worship with its categorical imperative of war-preparation and its unscrupulous exploitation of subject races springs from the perversities and obsessions of youth. Wicked and devilish old men have the wit to exploit this youthful totemism; but where honourable old age itself is seduced into these weird raptures and sadistic ferocities it is usually done by an appeal to its fear and greed, to its love of order and its dislike of anarchy. Marshal Pétain is a perfect example of what I mean.

The rôle played by old age at this great parting of the ways may be

regarded from many different angles. The most effective things we can appeal to in our attempt to break up and tear apart this racial totem-worship, with its threat to the intention of the gods and the 'entelecheia' of evolution, are the personal wishes and cravings of all the luckless individuals whose lives are subsumed under, and to a large degree *consumed* by, this squid-like totem.

In its drugged sex-obsession youth can submit to any sort of insane solvent or fusion of personality; but all the common man's calmer inclinations are sacrificed to this all-devouring sub-human organism.

Well! we are confronted here by two essential inquiries. First, how to discover what the common man's natural inclinations are; and second, how to discover what *is* the Intention of Providence or Evolution.

Now it is just here, in the opinion of at least one elderly man, that old age can prove of inestimable value. Dealing, as it inevitably does, with 'second thoughts', and always, as I have tried to show, extremely suspicious of Science as contrasted with Philosophy, old age is naturally alert to select from all the multifarious manifestations of human wishes offered to its attention those which conflict most intensely with the Nazi 'New Order'.

And not only with the Totalitarian New Order, but with all the many tendencies among ourselves that drift towards the main current of that sinister Order.

And what about our second problem; what about the Intention of Evolution? Here we come bolt up against the *fact* and upshot of the whole matter. For what if the Intention of Evolution, when examined and sifted by the 'second thoughts' of old age, should turn out to be nothing less than a complete synthesis of the calmer and more normal desires of the luckless 'common or garden man' which he has been forced — in Totalitarian States especially, but in *all* countries more or less — to renounce and suppress, in favour of the cuttle-fish totem of some sub-human race-entity? And how is it that age rather than youth turns out to be the best guide to those particular impulses in ordinary individuals which represent the forward movement of evolution? Simply because youth's head is so full of its own affairs — principally love-affairs — that it has no room left for the sensitized magnetic 'receiver', by means of which any person who has detached himself in the smallest degree from the obsession of sex and the illusion of possession can give ear to the

thousand-and-one shell-like whispers and murmurs and vibrations that rise to the surface and go drifting away upon the air from the convoluted heart of the common man. 'Airy vibrations?' some of you may protest. 'Surely all the common Britisher thinks about is booze and dogs and "the pictures" and horses and football and holidays by the sea; and all the American common man thinks about is' — and another rough catalogue will be rattled off, closing with cars, and film-stars and 'kiddies' and ice-cream; and other parallel delights, hardly less obvious, hardly more airy or subtle, will round off this protest, as your notion of the common man's bad taste in Russia and in China! Is it for these things, I shall be asked, that the Totalitarian New World is to be blown sky-high and a democratic one substituted?

Is it for these and for the murderous monotones of Mass-Production and Industrial-Slavery, rechristened now and semi-consecrated, because Big Business has become State-Business and State-Trusts? I admit these are appalling prospects. I admit we are 'up against it'. Between the social will of Young America bent on its sweeping ideal of vast production and colossal distribution and of Young Russia bent on heroic levellings and relentless liquidations, in what earthly direction can the contemplative mind of old age turn for help? To the oldest of all human civilizations. It can turn to China. China has undoubtedly been for thousands upon thousands of years the privileged land of old age; and one of the curious psychological results of this is the interesting paradox that the young people of China, or at least the young people belonging to the reborn Chinese Democracy that under the present government has fought Japan all these years, appear to be passionate students from their birth. For what is it to be a student? It is to have reverence for vast spaces of Time Past combined with a long view of Time to Come.

Learning, erudition, scholarship, aesthetic taste, philosophy — all these things have made up for so long the larger portion of the lives of the officials in China that it would seem incredible to a progressive-minded young Chinaman, devoting his life to his country's 'war-effort', that his culture should pull him in a different direction from his patriotism.

Four hundred millions of human beings are not likely to be torn from their habits and customs and superstitions and ignorances — nor from their cruelties either! — in one generation; but it would seem that between the aggressive individualism that runs side by side with the astounding

mass-production of America and the ecstatic ferocity which runs side by side with the awe-inspiring heroism of Russia an elderly Englishman may very naturally look towards China!

In the size of her population, from what I hear, China surpasses the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. rolled into one; while the success of her resistance to the invader—especially since both America and ourselves have had a taste of that invader's power—seems to us like a miracle.

But if I may be permitted to regard myself, with my Welsh name, as a typical aboriginal Welshman, I seem to detect a singular resemblance between the contemplative humour of the Chinese, so whimsically detached from the whole human situation, and the sort of humour that certain elderly Britishers betray at a pinch.

I believe the resemblance springs from the fact that both Britishers and Chinamen differ from all the other races of the world in being basically and ultimately *amused by life*; in fact as being unable to take Life entirely seriously, whether as regards philosophy, or morals, or aesthetics, and least of all as regards religion. You will perhaps protest: 'What of French irony?' but it seems to me, apart from Rabelais, the French take life, especially intellectual and aesthetic life, with preposterous gravity. In any case, were an elderly Britisher and an elderly Chinaman to discuss at this moment the sort of New Order they would like to see established in the world after the war, I believe it would be a discussion free from the bitter intensity we would expect from two old gentlemen of two other races equally as far apart!

Imagine then, seated on some mountain-terrace in Tibet, our two elderly humorists, who alone among the tribes of men *have not been squared*, as we say, by the gravity and ferocity of human reason and sardonic realism. And who knows if they won't be able, in their whims and their wise fancies, to project for this war-shocked planet and its bewildered inhabitants a system of World-Order more consonant with the hidden intention of evolution than any plan that has as yet been worked out by the more scientific advocates of the Federation of the World.

And wherein will it differ? Well! In the first place by obstinately, repeatedly, and shamelessly asking that crucial and irrational question, rarely propounded by expert or specialist: 'What does the ordinary man actually want?' Not, mark you, what *ought* he to want, or what, if he were instructed for ten years by scientific propaganda, he might be beginning

to *think* he wanted, but what, in scandalous though quite sober truth, he does really and seriously want. The whole point of my argument is that the two quickest short-cuts — and they can very well both be followed — to find out the most important of all questions and the true riddle of the Sphinx — ‘*What, if any, is the Intention of Evolution?*’ — are, first to make use of the long, time-sifted common sense of old age, and then to discover under the guidance of old age what, as I have presumed to hint above, the common man actually wants.

Well! and what *does* he want? *Not* — let us emphasize this at once — what satirical intellectuals in France, or upper-middle-class professors in England, or military patriots in Spain, or psychoanalytical practitioners in Vienna, or down-to-brass-tacks behaviourist novelists in New York, insist he wants.

Certainly not what the present régime in Russia — so admirably adapted for heroic defence — has been driven by destiny to impose upon its educators, its artists, its philosophers, its thinkers, and last but not least its enormous proletariat.

He does *not* want to go on toiling day and night, with devoted assiduity, at ‘piece-time’ pay in peace-time, in order that the next generation, or the generation after the next, shall have time to enjoy itself!

He wants to enjoy himself *now*. And when we come to the nature of the enjoyment he wants now, it is *not* to possess the proud puritanical satisfaction of feeling that everyone is being compelled to have the same austere proletarian taste for proletarian art, proletarian drama, proletarian dancing, proletarian furniture, and proletarian philosophy.

In a word he doesn’t crave for the exultant puritanical feeling that all human individuals are being hammered down to the same level. What does he want then? He wants a thousand over-tones of the feeling of rising above all levels! He wants over-tones of variety, over-tones of exciting differences, over-tones of fancies, whims, caprices, peculiarities, hobbies, cults, manias, specializations, eccentricities, *stunts*!

He doesn’t want to renounce half the natural enjoyments of human life because such enjoyments betray a ‘bourgeois mentality’. We have in fact to recognize that all *ideology*, as the cant phrase has it — and aye! the tragic misery this thing has caused! — is something thrust upon the ordinary person from above, not springing up spontaneously from his own nature.

An evil and a wretched necessity it seems to be, in our present condition, and one that cannot be escaped, that not human beings themselves, 'but their governmental representatives or their inspired 'leaders', *choose their wants*. And although it seems hopeless, as things are now, to accept the bold and spirited anarchist doctrine that if the State were abolished the people could, after one grand revolutionary uprising, run the world for themselves, we can at least recognize that the whole trend of Evolutionary Democracy is towards this happy consummation. And we can at any rate keep clearly at the back of our minds the general principle that the less these same 'representatives' become *leaders* the better for everybody.

If we could only cajole a sufficient number of devoted, fearless, honest, hard-working *representatives* to take the place of dictators and leaders and demagogues and messiahs and tyrants and prophets and priests, we should be making a step towards a New Order at the thought of which the heart of an old Englishman or an old Chinaman might, in the Wordsworthian phrase, 'leap up'.

What all 'Leaders' do is to corrupt the common man's mind by lying propaganda and then proceed by force and terror to destroy everything in him that opposes their will. In the case of the Germans and Japanese the 'Leaders' have been assisted in this crime against ordinary human nature by the existence, under the skin of these two powerful peoples, of that terrible Race-Totem which underlies, like the sub-human organism of Melville's oceanic *Squid*, all the individuals of these warlike nations; while in the case of our friendly, if temporally perverted, 'sweet enemies' the Italians, it is easy enough to envisage them apart from any leader-made 'ideology'. *Their* earth-bound and wholesome humanism is recognized by everybody as something that can never be corrupted at the root.

What the ordinary, common man all over the world wants is to enjoy his life. He wants regular work. He wants regular leisure. He wants a steadily rising standard of living. He wants larger opportunities and more culture for his children than he has had the luck to obtain for himself. Above all, he wants newspapers, films, and wireless that give him the facts from which he can draw his own conclusions.

To our imaginary watchers, our aged Chinaman and aged Britisher, surveying the stream of events from the slopes of the Himalayas, it will, I think, be made plain that an evolutionary 'tenth wave', the like of which has not been felt by humanists since the artful Cro-Magnons annihilated



the Neanderthals, is at this moment making use of anything and everything to further its secret end, taking advantage of the heroic and ferocious docility of the German soul, advantage of the hypnotic genius of Hitler and his terrible medium-ship for both Race and Devil, advantage of the Japanese conquistador-cult, of Mr. Chamberlain's appeasement-cult, of Franco's Grand Inquisitor's *panache*, of Stalin's 'liquidations', of German barbarities in Poland and Prague, of the gathering storm of passion in this Island for Russia, of the mass-production of tanks and ships and bombers in the United States, and finally taking advantage of our enemies' savage desperation compared with our own complacent selfishness, mischievous humour, and philosophic detachment, to make certain that its avalanche of destruction *does really go far enough* to shake down the bulwarks of the old and to clear the ground for the new.

So much at least is plain to our elderly disciples of Pelagius and Confucius from their present vantage-ground. But they must look closer into the mêlée than that! They must watch the actions of the energetic Mr. Willkie in the U.S.A., that vigorous champion of the individualistic small business-man. They must listen to the speeches of the eloquent New Dealers, friends of the President, as these financial specialists prophecy of the enormous markets-on-credit to be opened for all backward races of the earth, when the colossal American production-machine, converted from the materials of war to the raising of the standard of living, is directed towards all the untouchables, and all the coolies, and all the under-fed and over-worked labourers of the whole planet. They will consider how the common man's profoundest instincts under Russian Communism must and will be reconciled with his instincts under the state-regulated Capitalism of America and the independent democracy of the British Dominions. They must discover exactly in what way the ordinary man all the world over *wants more and not less* than our youthful fanatics of Communism, oblivious to so many of the side-issues of life and the more complicated human cravings, are demanding for him: wants, in fact, not more work but more leisure, not proletarian art but human art, not puritanical levelling down but individualistic levelling up.

Surely it is playing into the hands of the very persons we want most of all to reform — conceited and wooden-headed reactionaries who think that ordinary people are composed of different flesh and blood from themselves — to assume that we common folk have completely different

tastes, different desires, different necessities, different cravings from these supercilious rogues?

Not so different as you suppose, my masters! We want peace of mind about our economic life and about our social recognition by our neighbours just as you do; we want to be free to enjoy ourselves just as you do; we want to see something of the world before we die, just as you do; we each want, just as you do, the satisfaction of certain special peculiar, individual hobbies, adapted to our special personal, and individual, temperament. And our women are the same.

I tell you there is no aristocratic mania for solitude and silence and for being 'alone with Nature' and for preferring a horse or a dog rather than a human being as a companion; no mania for growing flowers, or tending a rock-garden, or a greenhouse; no mania for fishing, or hunting, or botanizing, or photographing, or boating, or sailing; no mania for just 'loafing and inviting our soul and observing a spear of summer grass', that we common men couldn't cultivate and be absolutely absorbed in, if only our money went a little further, if only our working-hours were a good deal shorter!

But we must remember that if the instinctive desires of ordinary proletarian men are *un-proletarian desires* the desires of ordinary proletarian women *are still more so*. What an ordinary woman wants, whether she be a Countess or a kitchen-maid, is what we all want — namely, to have our own money in our own pocket to spend in our own way!

To work at top pressure at mass-production under some awe-inspiring 'five-year plan' or under some equally terrifying New American System would be only possible for a person of natural human feeling if such a person were in return absolutely assured of a job and pay and holidays and short hours.

But as my elderly Chinaman, looking down from that Himalayan ridge upon the wholesome anarchy of an at-last-malleable world, has already explained to his elderly British friend, what would make a completely different thing — and even a very pleasant thing — of the working life of any woman would be the inauguration, following the lead of Chiang Kai-shek's policy, and not forgetting certain experiments in Catalonia, of small, self-governing industries and factories, in all possible localities, *all over the world!*

What our elderly watchers in the Himalayas cannot help detecting is

that the pain and fear and sickness and hunger and misery of this war and all its doubts and dilemmas and desperations and all its incredible evasions and insoluble enigmas have had a curious effect upon the ordinary man. They have destroyed what might be called, to use a simile from painting, his *Middle Distance*. They have covered the immediate future of every separate person's life with an invisible mantle of burning acids; so that although it is still possible by exerting what some could call a religious, some a moral, and some a metaphysical effort, to shake off or strip off or wash away this covering, there is a tendency such as never has existed before in the world to do one of two things — either to concentrate on the immediate present, its smallest and least significant details, or to throw the mind forward into the healing obscurity of the far distance, and to build up there, in the soft velvety dimness of that 'after-the-war' horizon, the *Civitas Dei* of the heart's cravings.

With their old men's long vision my not altogether imaginary watchers are aware of an immense magnetic vibration quivering and shivering over the whole earth, not a mere wave of unfulfilled wishes, though they, heaven knows, are there also, but something much more formidable and important, something the like of which has never occurred in the whole history of our race, something that *could* in fact only occur when a *scientific war*, like this war, has made the earth fifty times smaller than it has ever been — a wave, in fact, of evolutionary magnetic power re-creating the world!

The worst of it is — as my two typical old earth-men, the Britisher and the Chinaman, see perhaps clearest of all — is that this magnetic, creative wave, full of overtones and undertones and charged with all manner of psychic imponderables, is swept by the opposite winds of individualism and communism.

Each of these alternatives contains its own measure of good and its own measure of evil. Each contains appalling perils, each contains miraculous hopes; and the interesting thing — and the thing which certainly calls for all the power of the divining-rod of humorous detachment possessed by my aged pair — is to try to discover just how this clash — and may it be confined to a mental conflict! — will divide ourselves and our allies.

Russia under the dictatorship of Stalin can no longer, so we are led to understand, be regarded as representing orthodox Marxianism; nor need

we assume that any of the future forms which communism might take in France or Spain or Great Britain would resemble Russian communism as it is to-day.

But let us for a moment consider the 'imponderables' in this grave divergence. The chief 'imponderable' on the communistic side is surely a spontaneous puritanical hatred of everything that implies, or suggests, or is in any way connected with, the special privileges that have been 'liquidated' and with the old 'bourgeois mentality' that has become taboo.

With this very natural emotion there is mingled, it would seem, a touch of something less authentic, which my two old Mandarins, nodding together on their high terrace, would be, I think, justified in regarding as an aesthetic narrowness and an inhuman fanaticism.

The mingling, however, in communist psychology of puritanical devotion with a feeling of aesthetic superiority has one redeeming quality which must heighten the pleasure of daily life. I refer to that delicious sensuous glamour, which, like the mania for cleanliness so complacently manifested in Dutch interiors or the mania for rags and dirt indulged in by certain artists under the excuse of painting picturesque beggars, we can all enjoy when our life-illusion — the sense of our moral worth in our own eyes — is transformed into an exquisite physical sensation felt through every pore of our skin.

But if the chief imponderable advantage of the communist cult is, as I have hinted, a fanatical hatred of the bourgeois virtues combined with a sensuous abandonment to a feeling of aesthetic superiority, the chief imponderable advantage of British and American Individualism is that magical feeling of being alone with the Secret of Life, alone with the Cosmos, alone with the First Cause, that feeling of independence so dear to Walt Whitman, that sense of being inherently free from the domination of any class, any age, any party, any fashion of thought, free in the midst of the Creation, free in the presence of the Creator, free from any cause but the First Cause, from any order but the Order of Man; free to share, as in honour bound, a due portion of this hard world's labour; free to express upon the affairs of that world our private, personal, individual, exceptional, and often fantastical opinions!

My elderly Britisher, as with his Chinaman's help he sifts these matters to the ultimate grain, will however gradually discover that it is not so

much in the United States as in the British Commonwealth of Nations that this imponderable advantage of communism — its spiritual intoxication of mass-hypnosis — finds its extreme antithesis.

Americans have a spiritual power — sometimes dangerous and alarming! — of abandoning themselves to communal passion. But it never goes as far as with the Russians. With awe, with wonder, with puzzled admiration, the British common man, that whimsical amateur of the world, regards his spiritually intoxicated Muscovite ally, bearing the whole weight of the German Army; saving humanity from Hitler's 'Thousand years'.

This desperate self-obliteration for the Cause, this spiritual force that, for good or ill, like 'a rushing mighty wind' sweeps men and women together out of their individual selves and into a larger self, is to us a noble and fascinating mystery. In a sense I think we are more impressed by it than are our American brothers; perhaps because they understand it better than we do, or perhaps not — it is hard to say; but I have an inkling that we understand more easily the particular kind of endurance manifested by the Chinese.

To sum it all up, then; where old age is wiser than youth is in its possession of that most ancient of virtues: detachment.

It is with this divining-rod that it will utter, and utter humbly enough, its rumbling and mumbling and grumbling protestations as to the Democratic New Order. But one thing it does see: namely, that under the pressure of 'a power not ourselves making for righteousness' a vast, mysterious *magnetic wave* of new evolutionary life has begun to heave up from the depths; a wave that nothing can divert from its course, a wave that refuses to be directed by any propaganda from above or any dictatorship, whether of infallible religion or infallible science; a wave that springs from within; yes, from within the hearts of unnumbered millions of common men and women, and through them from a 'Within' that recedes further still, a 'Within' that seems to sink away *beyond this whole Dimension*.

## OLD AGE AND DEATH

THE one supreme advantage that Old Age possesses over Middle Age and Youth is its nearness to Death. The very thing that makes it seem pitiable to these less threatened and therefore less enlightened ages of man is the thing that deepens, heightens, and thickens out its felicity.

You will say that youth is more finely attuned as well as more passionately sensitized to the tremors and quivers and vibrations of life, and to the fainter airs, rarer intimations, less ponderable waftures of its pure essence; and I am prepared to accept, and not qualify at all, but to accept ungrudgingly and without reservation, the truth of your statement about the keener receptivity and finer porousness of young people. I would indeed emphasize this porousness and sensitivity to a degree even further than you.

For my point is that this very excitableness, this impassioned porousness, in young people is the thing above all others that makes it hard for them to get the utmost out of life. And this comes about for the extremely simple reason that the fine-spun and often finicky sensibilities and sophistications of youth side-track and waylay and confuse the grand and simple outlines of our planetary situation by a thousand curiosities, furious fancies, beguiling affectations, wandering impulses, crazy allurements, pretty manias, theatrical whimsies, fantastic obsessions, radiant cults, not to speak of the always absorbing and often devastating power of unrestrained erotic morbidities.

And if the very porousness of youth, its vibrant sensitivity to every detail, gesture and grandiose *panache* of art, politics, ambition, sex, sport, idealism, glory, self-obliteration, self-vivisection, draws it away from the basic awareness of the miracle of being alive and of 'the pleasure which there is in life itself', the anxious responsibilities and preoccupying duties of middle-age have a yet more absorbing effect. In both of these earlier epochs of the individual's career the fundamental outlines of the landscape of our destiny are blurred by passion and distorted by ambition. One is tempted to make a moral rhyme of it: 'Their vision must be *near* to please, for the wood is hidden by the trees.' Thus though it is true that

old peoples' senses are duller, their resilience weaker, their reactions stiffer, their responses heavier, their thoughts slower, all this is more than counterbalanced by the divine stimulus of their nearness to death

All day long and whenever they wake at night they get some kind of hurried message from their flagging outriders, those sense-messengers that do the work of 'liaison officers' between body and soul, to the effect that the end is at hand.

And this nearness of the end to which they cannot in their secret hearts be oblivious comes to resemble an ocean-sunken bell 'tolling them back' from all irrelevancies to the central miracle of being alive!

Yes, we've got to face it! The advantage of Old Age over all the earlier epochs of a person's life lies ultimately in the near approach of the end of the whole business.

At bottom, as Odysseus declared to the chiefs at the banquet of Alcinous, what rounds off and in a sense redeems — at least for those who come after us! — the horrors and atrocities and miseries and insanities of our life, its foolish glories and ignoble exultations, its patient endurances and infinite wearinesses, is simply *the story of it all*, with the added fact that it is *the kind of story*, the story of humanity itself, that has a thousand beginnings and no end!

But this reassuring if somewhat callous view of things, which in reality is neither as pessimistic nor as heartless as it sounds, is at once too far-reaching and too stripped and elemental to appeal to a life-loving young person or to a property-loving middle-aged person. And it depends for its efficacy upon the most tremendous psychic-physical shock the human imagination can receive, short of the horror of the Gestapo for bipeds or of Vivisection for quadrupeds.

It depends on our being compelled, by one blasting flame of eternally singed recognition, or from grim hour to grim hour by the searing acid of reluctant perception, to face two things, the one a certainty as sure as sunrise and the other with about as much mathematical probability in its favour as — shall I say? — four to six.

I refer, of course, in the first place to *the certainty of death*. Now this certainty when it *really* strikes our imagination is like an unexpected slap in the face; a slap from the brazen hand of a bronze statue that hitherto we have only seen hushed and harmless in its museum niche.

God! what a different thing this realization is from what might be

called the certainty of death in general. The certainty of death in general, though it may be as undeniable as that the Mountains in the Moon will last as long as the Moon, leaves us cheerfully self-satisfied.

To give him *that twitch*, in the fatal pit-of-the-stomach nerve which alone sets the bells of his whole island-fortress jangling, a man must forsake generalities altogether. He must realize that the talk is now about the coming to an end of that *I, I, I*, whose feelings are simply *all there is* to me, me, me!

We are approaching at this point, as my brother Llewelyn used so often to remind us, the slippery, quivering, darting, doubly-electrified salmon-trout-nerve of the 'Richard is Richard, Annie is Annie' self-- that loving-hating, spring-heel Jack within us that makes the world go round!

Yes, we stand on the brink of the ultimate precipice watching the ravens flap across the abyss. We are talking now about the old fellow whose smallest physical concern comes like the shadow of the whole earth between him and the Multiverse. He it is who -- and make no mistake, my friend; the poor devil is yourself -- who now, very now, visualizes the inflamed condition of his 'prostate gland' in the curves of the pattern on his lavatory floor; and who, as he catches from somewhere outside the house the heavenly sound of the cawing of rooks, bethinks him of a particular churchyard forty years ago where one woman read Jane Austen's *Emma* to another woman, as they sat together under a wall of flint. He it is who ponders, as he searches with the tip of his tongue for the little hole at the base of his eye-tooth, whether he'll be able to dodge the dentist till the end of the autumn; he it is who invents a crushing retort about that matter of war-tactics to the stranger who made a fool of him in the crowded railway-carriage the other day. He is the self in all of us that is most itself where it hides beneath the foundations of the world where its shoe pinches worst.

But I refer in the second place to a still graver possibility, though it is not quite so certain; namely, the appalling possibility that the 'I' upon whom this whole world of intimate impressions depends will soon have to face its absolute *annihilation*. The sun will rise as before, and the winds will blow as before. People will talk of the weather in the same tone. The postman will knock as he did just now and the letters will fall on the mat. But *he* won't be there. He, our pivot and the centre of everything, will be nowhere at all.



Well then, where in heaven's name, you are asking me now, lies the grand advantage of old age? To be nearer extinction, nearer what may easily prove *everlasting* extinction? What advantage is there in that? I will answer you in one word and that word is *proportion*. We get for the first time in life when we grow old a sense of proportion.

And the more anyone thinks of it the more clearly will it be shown to him that in this sense of proportion lies the whole mastery of life. The truth is that we poor dullards of habit and custom, we besotted and befuddled takers of life for granted, require the hell of a flaming thunderbolt to rouse us to the fact that every single second of conscious life is a miracle past reckoning, a marvel past all computation.

No doubt there are miseries and pains so acute and weariness so overwhelming that it is better not to be than to be as we are. But many of these moments, if we only manage to outlive them, will pass; will pass and leave us — alive. 'Life is sweet' is the word on the lips of the ordinary man and it covers a great deal, though I suppose it is not a complete retort to the logic of pessimism.

Most actual embodiments of this 'sweetness' are, all the same, constantly, daily, hourly, momentarily being sprinkled with salt, with vinegar, with gall, with wormwood, with assafoetida, with colocintida.

But it almost seems as if, though this is a great mystery, the very *tick, tick, tick* of the great time-machine, apart from what it actually grinds out for us, were itself a throb of enjoyment; and if this is true, and I believe it is true, there must be a residue of life-enjoyment resting in congealed security like a great crystallized yellow plum, from which, if only we had the wit to bite and squeeze, we could suck up paradisiac juice.

But further discoveries can be made as we sink our shaft into this the mysterious substratum of life-enjoyment which underlies all the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' and all the tastes and smells and touches and sights and sounds which in our honourable loathing or in our degenerate fastidiousness — for it makes small difference which of the two it is — do so greatly offend and trouble us.

Is there, for instance, we may ask, in actual human experience such a thing as isolating the enjoyment of life itself, the enjoyment of the pure, unique unqualified life-sensation from all our other sensuous and psychic feelings so that we have the right to cry aloud like Faust to the moment that reveals it: 'O stay; thou art so fair!':

We all know the false, complacent conventional tone in which certain middle-aged persons repeat the stock phrase: 'On a day like this it's good to be alive' and then hurry away without giving this 'good' or this 'life' a second thought.

If any age among 'the seven ages of man' can claim the right to adjudicate on this unfathomable subject it is surely Old Age; and if I may be permitted to play the part just here of a medium through whose mouth Old Age can speak I would say that this baffling, slippery and evasive fish, *the life-sensation in itself*, is never caught until we're old and *then* only by that rather special type of old gentleman hinted at in the Grail Myth under the appellation of the 'Fisher-King'.

I would even go further and suggest that the mythological 'Maimed King' became the Guardian of the Grail purely on the strength of being 'maimed' — in plain words of being a eunuch — and that all this clearly points to the fact, to which, too, the Christian *logos*, 'the pure in heart shall see God' and the heathen custom of maiming the Priests of Cybele both bear witness, that it is only when the virility of the sex-urge has died down and the Nature-enforced chastity of Old Age has taken its place that 'the pleasure which there is in life itself' rises up like water seeking its level and diffuses itself through our whole consciousness.

Although no doubt in a not far distant future the stigma will be removed from every manifestation of sex save in cases of cruel or dangerous sadism, there is no doubt that a great many people of both sexes will still seek, and generally seek in vain, to anticipate in youth and middle-age those more magical and more exquisite pleasures that reach Old Age purely because the sex-obsession is removed.

It by no means follows, however, that because an old person is liberated from the disturbing tyranny of the sex-urge that he inevitably, as the ancient Myth puts it, 'sees the Grail' or, in other words, in spite of his infirm and purblind senses becomes porous to the *life-sensation in itself*.

This old-age Vision of the Grail, or, to put it plainly, this felicitous embrace of air, earth, water, fire, is not to be had without training and practice. And even *with* training and practice it is likely enough that nothing except a shocking and startling awareness of the near approach of death can establish its enjoyment as a daily habit.

It seems, too, that along with *the life-sensation in itself* the element in

which that slippery and evasive *fish*, if I may use such a symbol, *swims* must count for something.

This element is too complicated a mystery to be lightly defined in words; but the acceptance of life on the terms of life being a *story* must take, I think, an important place in such a background.

Old people, and not without cause, are often accused of egotistic garrulousness. But if this volubility be carefully examined, or at least considered in its relation to the whole stream of life, it will I think become evident, whether he realizes it or not himself, that our old man in these tiresome, chattering, egotistical effusions is offering his tribute and his sacrifice — in *his* case a sacrifice not of flowers and fruit or of a spotless lamb but of his own dignity and self-respect — to the great goddess Mnemosyne, Mother of the Muses.

Yes, in only one way can our mortal and, it may be, our immortal life be heartily, thoroughly, and absolutely justified, and that way is by *treating it as a story*.

To consider life, first and last, as a story is to treat it as only Old Age and Old Age only in the last and final revelation of its accumulated experience, when that experience is illuminated by the lonely Lighthouse of Death, has the wisdom to treat it. Shakespeare's 'ripeness is all' can only be interpreted in this way.

Who has not wondered in awe and pity at the power old people have of sitting for hours — God! and here lie secrets that have been lost to us since our perambulator days! — without reading or writing, *knitting* perhaps if they're women, because knitting leaves the attention free, but in any case breathing in and swallowing down and drinking up, absorbing through every pore of their old withered skins — Oh Prince, what shameless joy! Oh Prince, what scandalous pleasure! — the *story* of the life around them.

It has fallen to me, as it fell to neighbours of the great Feodor Michaelovitch, to have an epileptic friend, and I believe it is a peculiarity of this *sacred sickness* that it heightens, almost to a point of rapture, the smallest detail of the story of all persons and of all things that can possibly have a story; and I have been trying in vain for some minutes, as I complete this sentence, to imagine *any* that haven't got one of some sort.

And what the *sacred sickness* does, and what the delicious state of *convalescence* after a recovery from almost any sickness can do too, is exactly

what the piping of the Curlew of Death does, as it comes nearer and nearer over the mountain.

I implore my reader — whatever his age may be — to use a little introspection at this point and try to discover exactly what it is in him that chiefly — apart from all hope of a 'good time' to come, and beneath all immediate miseries and pains and worries — finds life sweet and death the opposite of sweet!

What I think I find with regard to my own life-love, or life-hold, or life-clinging, is anything but a simple discovery. It is as complicated and many-cornered as Sir Thomsa Browne's well-loved *quincunx*!

The living nucleus of it seems to be what might be described as a quick silver-soul of electrified vitality, a torpedo-shaped slippery *life-fish* of which I am as vividly conscious as if it actually were an inexhaustible entity within me only itching for its chance to fling my old skeleton and all the rotten compost it contains on the nearest dung-heap and 'there let him lay!' as the lordly poet says.

The odd thing is that nothing in this curious visualizing of the life-nucleus within me carries with it the faintest 'intimation of immortality' or of any survival of death. In fact it seems to belong to the inherent nature of this particular mental presentation that the activity of its imaginary presence absorbs the energy required for such intimations.

What I would like to bring into more articulate relief than is usual in my own thinking, and I suspect in the thinking of most of us, is the precise feeling or emotion that we have vaguely at the back of our consciousness when we declare that our 'life-sensation' or 'life-awareness' is doubled or trebled by the approach of Death.

The intensely magnetized and electrified life-nucleus within us which I choose to call 'the soul' and which gives us the feeling it could be exteriorized from the body is only the centre of this life-lightening.

There is also our quickened response to the external events that compose the story of our life or of anybody's life. And beyond and behind this tragic-comic, romantic-vulgar, transparent-obscure, pitiful-grotesque History of Ourselves there is what we loosely and vaguely call Nature, a word which is especially and peculiarly used for animals, birds, fishes, reptiles, together with the vegetable world and those aerial landscapes wherein both the animate and the inanimate play their part.

Yes, and beyond this, beyond both our human drama and that back-

ground of it which we call Nature, there is the impact of the primordial elements — air, earth, water, fire — which in their immeasurable extension through Time and Space possess for some minds such a fatal attraction that they reduce the Humanized Beauty of Nature just as they reduce the Idealized story of Man to a false and tricky mathematical illusion. These are those imperishable elements which when they are objects of our sense-satisfaction remain an inexhaustible and magical delight, but when they decoy and mislead the mind towards that false though logical Boundlessness which is one alternative of the teasing antinomy, '*an end — no end*', where the mind *simply stops working* before the space-time milestone upon which is written in the ancient Greek tongue: 'Beyond Me Nothing', they plunge us into pure rationalized insanity.

Wholesome indeed in view of this insane reasoning is the uncongenial, unaccommodating, disquieting phenomenon of death. Why, the mere nearness of death by its effect upon our fibres and tissues and upon our receptive apprehensions hardens, toughens, stiffens, and benumbs our natural reaction to the thought of this ultimate shock.

The truth is that death, like the old Roman God Janus, has two faces — one the face turned to youth which is a face of a fearful but expressionless horror; and one the face turned to old age, across which pass all manner of simple, ordinary, familiar expressions, some of them of a humorous detachment, some of them of a peaceful friendliness, and finally some of them of a grumbling acquiescence.

But there is another angle to this whole matter. We must remember that both life and death are in one sense aspects of Nature just as Nature in another sense is an aspect of the life and death of every living thing. In one sense you can say that Nature is completely indifferent to the fate of individual men and women; but in another sense she is infinitely considerate.

We are at the same time creators of Nature and sons and daughters of Nature, and if we escape the more horrible and harrowing kinds of death, such as our secret personal Litany frantically pleads against, what seems to happen to us, according to the Great Mother's indulgent provision, is that the nearer we get to the end the more 'native and endued' to that end does our identity become.

The energy of our apprehensions wanes, the sensibility of our affections dwindles, the up-leap of our spirit declines, and an insidious weariness

takes possession of us—in a word we feel *tired*; not tired of just this or that, not tired of any particular occupation or any particular struggle, but tired of the whole business, tired of the effort to enjoy, tired of the effort to endure, tired of the effort *to be*.

It is Nature herself who works this change, and as we yield ourselves up to it—and the grand trick is to fall relaxed before it, as men can fall to the ground without trying to save themselves—there is a certain pleasant irony to be enjoyed if we keep our heads; for in the very act of this interior abandonment to death it is possible to get high praise from our friends for the unconquerable vitality of our life-zest!

Here as in everything else we are completely justified in living a double life; that is to say in making unremitting efforts to keep, in a terribly literal sense, *our end up*, while all the while, deep down below the surface, we yield ourselves completely and entirely to this strange, sweet, new feeling.

For such is Nature's unfathomable indulgence to those of her offspring who follow her lead that there actually is a sweetness, a sweetness never known before and totally unexpected, in the steady, unremitting pull towards the formless elements out of which our exacting and exhausted form originated.

If I were asked, as an average specimen of normal old age—only, of course, these concepts 'average' and 'normal' have no real existence save in the heads of metaphysical Realists—what has been the chief mental effect upon me of reaching the last lap of my life, I would say, after considerable introspection, that it was a certain pushing open, wider and wider till they seem as if they could open no further, of the 'magic casements' of the mind. Now I know well that if my questioner demanded what I *mean* by such an opening of windows I should feel for a moment or two at sea. But I would proceed to save my self-respect, by some far-fetched image, such as 'Childe Roland's Tower', and I would try to indicate that what I have in my mind is an observatory of circular shape looking out upon opposite horizons—or, if you prefer, upon opposite landscapes—either Northward and Southward, or Eastward and Westward.

And I'd be trying to suggest, by this metaphorical North and South or East and West, two opposing conceptions of Nature; one of them implying the existence of a Power upon which we can depend in faith and hope, and the other implying a plurality of mysterious dimensions,

among whose bewildering multiplicity we can trust nothing but ourselves.

Now what I mean by falling into the mental habit of pushing open the two opposite windows of the mind as far as they will go, or at least as far as their creaky frames will stand such treatment, is the advisability of living the same sort of 'double life' in our philosophy as we have found to be essential in the practical conduct of our affairs.

Thus as our hold upon things relaxes a little, and we feel ourselves beginning to regard death as a haven, and non-existence as a refuge, after stormy seas, the really crafty and sagacious thing to do, it seems to me, is to begin practising the difficult art of being in *utrumque paratus*, 'prepared for either event'; and not merely being 'prepared' but of making imaginative flights, as we gaze through our windows, flights across the two opposing landscapes that lie outstretched before us, one of them illumined by the rising sun of all man's hopes, and the other, where the twilight falls, not so much unfriendly to our longings and desires, as absolutely indifferent.

If, I say, I can be allowed to regard my own feelings as fairly representative of the state of mind to which the milestone of our last lap — 'lap' is a good word! — should bear witness, namely a balanced scepticism with regard to the whole question of survival or annihilation, I would like to point out that over and above this obvious dualism, this dualism of the alternate twilights of resilience and resignation, there is at the back of my mind a shrewd conclusion from all this, or perhaps I ought to say a shrewd commentary upon all this, to the effect that when you consider all the other dualities and alternatives of the *Dimension of Opposites* in which we live, there is not one pair where the two are of equal strength!

Consider a few of them for a moment. Day is stronger than Night, Light than Darkness, Man than Woman, Mind than Matter, Life than Death, Creation than Destruction, Time than Space, Good than Bad, the Many than the One.

Indeed there would have been no world at all, no creation of anything, no existence of anything, if these opposites had been equal in strength. *They would have cancelled each other out.* They would have balanced each other so completely that a deadlock, a stalemate, a neutrality so absolute as to be tantamount to a universal black-out, would have resulted. It would have been a case of Hegel's 'Being' and 'Not-Being' showing themselves as identical — that is to say, as Nothing-at-all.

Now if in the case of these other pairs of opposites *some* degree of predominance of the one over the other has been shown inevitable *if there was to be anything there at all*, so also with this our present case, of survival of death versus total eclipse in death. If the natural vitality of the living soul within us be stronger than our body's natural exhaustion, if the natural life-leap of our essential personality be stronger than the natural death-slide of our flesh and blood, why then — not by Aristotelian logic, I admit, but by an easy Platonic analogy — does it not look as if there might be (what shall I say?) we 'Survivalists' are, I confess, as bad as some Revivalists in what my brother Llewelyn would call our waverings and haverings round the crucial point — but does it not look as if there *might* be, when all these predominances, of light over darkness, good over bad, creation over destruction have been carefully considered, a feather's weight, a gossamer's fall, in favour of our *not*, as Horace says, *dying 'omnis'*?

There must be, of course, as infinite a variety of ways of reacting to the near approach, or comparatively near approach, of a person's own death as there are human individuals blamelessly puffing and whistling on, like innocent locomotives, at this very hour, towards our Common Terminus.

But I cannot help feeling, since most of us have eyes, nose, mouth, ears, and a sensitive skin, that there must be a bit more in common between us of sensations, emotions, intimations, terrors, reliefs, comforts, than there is of the unshared, the unlike, the unreproducible, and the absolutely unique.

And, after all, the great aesthetic law holds as soundly and profoundly in the matter of personality as it does in the matter of architecture or sculpture. There can be no such thing as originality until there is some universal standard of dignity, proportion, seemliness, balance, and nearness to, or remoteness from, Nature.

Among the effects of Old Age in this connection that I cannot resist believing are shared universally among us is a strange, deep, obscure feeling that the nearer we come to the edge of death the more solutions of riddles, the more revelations of hidden causes and effects, are drawn towards us, fished up, magnetized up, sucked up, out of this bottomless cosmic hole, till they touch the orbit of our consciousness.

Yes, we live in a Dimension of Opposites and each pair of Cosmic Opposites is linked together in a union much closer than any merely logical or metaphysical antithesis. Take the horror of this war and the



common man's longing for peace. This longing is a fact; but another fact is that our whole cosmos depends upon war. Without war there would be no Nature. Life would present us with a universal blank. To come into existence at all, to be born at all, implies a terrific victory and a crashing defeat in a fearful and a shocking war.

The original 'fiat!' *Let there be Being!* cannot, alas, be restricted to the mild and beneficent adjuration: 'Let there be Light!' It was the impious mutilation of Uranus by Saturn which set the world-top spinning; while the collapse of the protagonist at either pole of any of these fatal antinomies would hurl back both victor and vanquished to the threshing-floor of pre-creative chaos!

These scratching, tickling, stinging, biting *enemy-mates* are, whether their sphere be electrons, or philosophies, or universes, the real dynamic cause why everything is what it is.

As far as we are concerned one of the difficulties about this system is that we ourselves in different moods desire the victory of a different champion. In some moods we want Bad, for instance, to conquer Good, Multiplicity Unity, Darkness Light, Woman Man, Solitude Society, Anarchy Order, Death Life.

Let us apply this principle, then, to those crucial dualities which become more and more vivid the nearer we approach our end: the alternative in one case between annihilation and survival; and the alternative in the other case between a Universe of one god and a Multiverse of many Dimensions and of many gods.

Now we know from our own experience that it is entirely possible in certain moods to wish most heartily to be dead; and not only to be dead, but to be annihilated forever and forever with no remote chance of re-appearance or re-incarnation.

In the same way it is entirely possible — in fact I am not ashamed to confess that such is my own predilection — to *prefer* a Multiverse of Dimensions, although a less warm and cosy and snug sort of world, to a universe of the old-fashioned rounded-off kind, with One Matter, One Mind, One Space, One Time, One Humanity, One God!

For my own part I feel as if there were more fresh air, more liberation, more chance, more wholesome anarchy, more open horizons, about this sort of world, and yet it is no joke to think of having to face it in reality and in detail!

In any case that life and death are fatally fused together it is impossible to deny. And it would appear that the deeper their roots descend into the recesses of existence the closer their embrace becomes.

Thus as we ourselves approach death and begin to catch the anticipatory murmurs, the premonitory breathings, the mysterious effluences, the magnetic vibrations, the elemental ripples, made in advance by this dark waterfall, it is impossible not to feel that these stirrings must carry with them, for all their disquieting chill, *some* positive electricity, *some* seminal pollen, *some* Jovian-Danaean gold-dust, from that Night-Nursery of 'the Mothers' between whose mystic portals and Death's Acherontic staircase there seems to be a secret postern!

That there is some such link — O much more than a link! — some such tender-cruel creative embrace, can be proved by the way we inevitably wed together the very words 'Life and Death'.

Round these two words a blank-verse *aura* hangs, that in itself carries a perfume rare, sweeter than last year's leaves, a scent that burns like burning weeds, and floats away to sink, like smoke below the horizon of the world!

What is it that has taken hold of these two syllables so that the one reaches our human ear as if sprayed upon by the dazzlements of a sunrise at high tide; and the other as if weighed upon by heavy clods ploughed up in dripping fog from the brown furrow where Jason lay with Demeter?

It is simply that certain words in every tongue, coeval with the oldest migrations if not actually autochthonous, have been weathered so long, have grown so inured to the psychic rains and frosts and droughts and floods of their tribe's communal experience that the platonic essence of all poetry — by which I mean the continuity of our reactions to that historic necessity which is the same now as it was at the start — is gathered up into their very sound and substance; so that they become true polytheistic *Logoi*, beyond and beneath any one redemptive *Logos*, of the queer Dimension to which we are at present confined.

What all old men and all old women were wise to practise in their habitual thoughts is a certain fusion of the mystery of life and the mystery of death, 'neither dividing the substance', as the creed says, nor merging, as the rationalists love to do, our mortal human destiny in the immortal elements.

We are told that in the moments immediately before death by drowning we are assailed or solaced by a vivid reassembling of all the most powerful impressions of people and things made upon us during the whole course of our life.

Well! It would seem as if it might be both possible and desirable to fix our attention, long ere this final moment, upon these memorable persons and things.

You will doubtless, oh excellent reader, whoever you are, have played to your satisfaction the pleasantly-tragic game of imagining or inventing your *last words* on a mentally unclouded — and we may well pray a physically *painless* — death-bed.

You have also, I daresay, considered, with a natural if egoistical interest, the subject of graves and epitaphs. Of course we must, in the words of the greatest of all geniuses, who is neither Homer nor Shakespeare but the nameless and shameless common man of the generations, 'draw the line somewhere'.

And though I must confess to the unphilosophical opinion that 'telling ourselves stories' about our own death and our own burial is the most harmless and innocent of all vaingloriousings, even here, as among other human bagatelles, that everlasting spoil sport, conscience, begins to get to work, like the snouted mole he is, whispering that we'd best toss into the chilly void all thoughts of monuments and inscriptions and medallions and cherubic wings and palm-leaves and the superior sanctimonies of death's-heads, and concentrate, as ordinary people did in classic times, on the terrible finality and the homely comfort and the ghastly humour and the piercing pitifulness of this certain loss of all we have and very likely of all we are.

The truth of the matter is that wise and kindly Nature — for when you really think of it this 'indifference' of Nature to our individual sufferings can be as unjustly and unfairly emphasized as can her solicitude. Time and chance! Those are the words. There is abominable unfairness, injustice, inequality, in the way she deals out among her children death and pain and accident and sickness and penury and madness and vile repute. But there is always the other side.

An old man who can already hear the fall of the rapids and feel the breath of their mortal chill must surely, as he looks back through the years, be aware of a residuum of experience that makes him turn proudly away

from the thin impoverished mental atmosphere of such a phrase as 'Science teaches', turn even from the warmer, richer, but scarcely less bracing air of 'In nomine Patris', turn from both of them, and steer his barque, 'unaffrighted by the silence round him', to where between the untrammelled sea and the high, cold, unloving constellations he can take counsel with the depths of his own soul.

My own view of the profoundest trend in Christian psychology, using the genius of Jesus and Paul and Dostoevsky as its spear-head but bringing up other forces behind them, has to do with the prophetic vision of the weak and the foolish and the undistinguished and the neurotic and the ill-constituted and the infantile and the senile.

Old Age, as soon as it begins to catch on the air the approach of death, acts as Nature does in the wilting of her deciduous vegetation and in the more gradual erosion and subsidence of her primeval rocks. Yes, through the enchanted dyings down of the flames of dissolution in decaying forests, through the titanic collapsings of monumental terraces in the landslides of Time-corrupted promontories, the old God Pan, mumming and miming in grotesque decrepitude under the weight of the enormity of his piled-up years, reveals to the loose-limbed daughters of Time in their whirling dance — only they rarely pause to listen — that celestial burden of broken murmurs, and childish gabble, and bedlam fits and starts, by which, much more than in any wisdom of our boasted Science, are made articulate the 'second thoughts' of the Invisible Weavers of Destiny.

Thus the final and ultimate effect of the presence of Death upon an old man or an old woman may well prove to be, when the mind is driven back to its last barrier, nothing less than that abysmal 'doubt of all appearances', that doubt of all human reason and all human imagination, which reverts to the childish question that has never been answered and *can never be answered*. 'Why am I myself? Why is the World the World? Why is anything anything?' This is that sublime and comical doubt upon which at the last all our hope depends and which nothing can take away.

So absolute are the limitations of our minds, so questionable the whole panorama of what we think we see and have seen, that the attitude upon which we are thrown back at the end of our life is one of cheerful ignorance and of fearless expectation.

## THE ART OF GROWING OLD

One thing we are sure of and only one: namely, that whatever the reality may be, if 'reality' itself is not a figment of the brain, it is a reality totally different from anything we have imagined, or thought of, or dreamed, a reality that is quite as likely to come nearer the heart's desire than in our ignorance we thought possible, as it is to defeat our hope, mock our struggle, deny our instinct, confound our faith, annihilate our being.

What rises up within us to face this tremendous *finale* is in fact what all along we have secretly guessed: namely, that though in reality we know nothing and have found little, we are likely enough to lose less and need have no fear of anything.

